

Pope Leo's Magisterium on Migrants

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For this second session of sharing, I have been entrusted with the task of presenting a summary of Pope Leo's magisterial teachings on the phenomenon of migration during the early months of his pontificate. Aiming to offer a view that is as coherent and faithful to his thought as possible, this analysis has not been limited to major documents – such as the Encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas* and the Apostolic Exhortation *Dilexi te* – but has taken into account the full range of references to migration found in his various interventions: from catechesis to Angelus addresses, from messages to homilies, as well as greetings and speeches delivered during meetings, audiences, and pastoral visits. Particular attention has also been paid to significant statements made during his apostolic journeys to Spain and Lampedusa – places that, due to their history and symbolic significance, hold a special place in the Church's reflection on migration.

An examination of this extensive body of texts reveals several key themes that run with remarkable consistency through the Holy Father's teaching. Without claiming to exhaust their richness, I wish to focus on a few fundamental points: the inalienable dignity of the migrant person; the centrality of the human person as an indispensable criterion for all reflection and policy regarding migration; the relationship between the right to migrate and the right not to be forced to emigrate; the call for the Church to allow itself to be challenged by the journey and witness of migrants; the role of migrants as protagonists of evangelization; the ongoing relevance of the paradigm expressed by the verbs “to welcome, to protect, to promote, and to integrate”; the firm condemnation of networks of exploitation and human trafficking; and, finally, the constant reference to Sacred Scripture as a key to interpreting the migration experience.

Taken together, these elements demonstrate how the magisterium of Leo XIV stands in profound continuity with the teachings of his predecessors – particularly John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and, above all, Pope Francis. At the same time, it displays distinctive and original emphases that further enrich ecclesial reflection on migration and the Church's mission in the contemporary world.

The Dignity of Migrants

A central theme of the Holy Father's magisterium regarding migrants is the recognition of their dignity. This is not a new concept, given the frequent references found in the magisterium of his predecessors; however, in the teachings of Leo XIV, the theme emerges often and with such vigour that it becomes the unifying thread of his statements on migrants.

The dignity of the migrant is grounded in Christian anthropology: the human person, created in the image and likeness of God, possesses a unique, inalienable, and inviolable value – a value inherent simply in the fact of existing and being loved by the Creator. This dignity is an original and unconditional gift that precedes any specific capability or social status. Such intrinsic dignity establishes the fundamental equality of all human beings, placing the person at the heart of all authentic social and human development [Leo XIV, 2026a:52-53].

On 12 June 2026, in Tenerife (Spain), outside the bishop's residence, Leo XIV delivered an impromptu greeting and expression of gratitude centered on the value of human dignity:

Thank you for the welcome you extend to all immigrants. We all desire to be recognized for the human dignity the Lord bestowed upon us at the moment of our creation. We are all brothers and sisters: some from Peru, some from Colombia, some from Venezuela, some from Tenerife. But together we are all one human family. [Leo XIV, 2026b]

On that same occasion, the Holy Father highlighted that

solidarity arises from the recognition of human dignity and transcends any mere act of charity or philanthropy. It is called to be a commitment and to take the form of a process. Welcome opens the door; integration helps one cross the threshold. Assistance applies a salve to the wound, and integration rebuilds the future. [Leo XIV, 2026b]

The previous day, during a meeting with migrant reception groups at the port of Arguineguín in the Canary Islands, the Holy Father had clarified that human dignity does not depend on nationality or place of origin: «Human dignity has no passport and does not lose its value when crossing a border» [Leo XIV, 2026c].

A few weeks later, in Lampedusa (Italy) – another symbolic site on the migrant route – Leo XIV revisited this theme, underscoring the infinite value of human dignity: «Unfortunately, in every age, there are those who fear being “contaminated” by contact with others, thus denying – even in the face of suffering and death – our common origin in God, the infinite dignity of every human being, and the call to boundless love» [Leo XIV, 2026d].

Migrants are not numbers, files, or problems to be managed; they are people. Even when forced to leave everything behind, even when crossing the desert or the sea, they are never stripped of their dignity. From this, stems a fundamental assertion: dignity comes first. It does not lose its value when crossing a border; it does not depend on the possession of documents, and it cannot be suspended in the name of security or national interest. For Leo XIV, the common good itself is the social expression of human dignity (Leo XIV, 2026a:59); therefore, every migration policy must be measured by its capacity

to safeguard life, guarantee safe and legal pathways, rescue those in danger, combat traffickers, protect victims, and promote genuine processes of welcome and integration.

In the realm of migration—as in other social spheres—when faced with abuses and violations of human dignity, one must take a stand for the most vulnerable. Leo XIV affirmed this in November 2025, in a catechesis titled “To Hope Is to Take a Stand. Dorothy Day”: «Faced with injustice, inequality, where human dignity is trampled underfoot, where the fragile are silenced: take a stand. To hope is to take a stand. To hope is to understand in our hearts and show in our actions that things must not continue as before. This too is the good fire of the Gospel» [Leo XIV, 2025a].

The application of this duty to the defence of the dignity of migrants was reaffirmed by the Holy Father in January 2026, during his address to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See.

In its international relations and actions, the Holy See consistently takes a stand in defence of the inalienable dignity of every person. It cannot be overlooked, for example, that every migrant is a person and, as such, has inalienable rights that must be respected in every situation. Not all migrants move by choice, but many are forced to flee because of violence, persecution, conflict and even the effects of climate change, as in various parts of Africa and Asia. In this year, [...] I renew the Holy See’s hope that the actions taken by States against criminality and human trafficking will not become a pretext for undermining the dignity of migrants and refugees. [Leo XIV, 2026e]

Christians, together with public institutions and civil society, are called to be vigilant and to act: embracing what promotes human dignity and rejecting what diminishes it. Closeness to migrants thus becomes a concrete test of faith, for in the arriving brother—marked by fear, hunger, or violence—the Church recognizes the face of Christ.

Today, by the sea, the Word becomes concrete: here arrive many wounded lives, stripped of almost everything, yet never—never—of their dignity. Here, the Gospel tears us away from the comfortable seat of the spectator and places us face-to-face with the brother who is arriving. It asks us whether we have been able to recognize Christ in those who disembark, marked by fear, hunger, and violence, after the desert, the night, and the sea

[...] Dear migrants: before saying anything else to you, I wish to bow before your dignity. You are not numbers or case files! You are people with a family and a home left behind, with dreams that no one has the right to scorn. [Leo XIV, 2026c].

The issue of migration thus becomes a litmus test for the moral quality of societies and the Gospel consistency of believers: where the dignity of migrants is recognized, welcoming them becomes a shared responsibility, and borders can transform from places of exclusion into spaces where human life is protected.

When it comes to recognizing the dignity of migrants, the continuity between the Magisterium of Leo XIV and that of Pope Francis is evident:

Even more regrettable is the fact that migrants are increasingly being used as bargaining chips, as pawns on a chessboard, victims of political rivalries. As we all know, the decision to emigrate, to leave one's homeland or territory of origin, is undoubtedly one of the most difficult decisions in life. How can suffering and despair be exploited to advance or defend political agendas? How can political considerations prevail when it is the dignity of the human person that is at stake? The basic lack of human respect at national borders diminishes all of us in our "humanity". Beyond the political and legal aspects of irregular situations, we must never lose sight of the human face of migration and the fact that, beyond the geographical divisions of borders, we are part of a single human family. [Francis, 2021]

The Centrality of the Human Person

A second central theme in the teaching of Leo XIV regarding migration is the centrality of the human person. Even before speaking of "flows," "emergencies," "borders," or "management," the Holy Father invites us to recognize the faces and stories of the people involved. As he himself states: «The situation of migrants and refugees requires a response that places people at the centre, addresses the causes forcing them to leave, and goes beyond the mere management of flows» [Leo XIV, 2026f].

This perspective does not seek to minimize the importance of the social, political, and economic dimensions of the migration phenomenon. On the contrary, it reminds us that these dimensions can be adequately understood only if they are not separated from the concrete experience of the men, women, and children forced to leave their homelands. The Pontiff's focus, therefore, is primarily on migrants rather than on migration itself. This approach invites us to look beyond a purely sociological or geopolitical interpretation of human mobility.

Indeed, when the migrant is reduced to a statistical figure, an administrative category, or a problem to be contained, there is a risk of losing sight of the essential element: the human person. Every migrant is a distinct individual with a unique and unrepeatable story in the eyes of God. From this perspective, welcoming, protecting, promoting, and integrating migrants are not merely organizational strategies or management tools; rather, they are concrete expressions of recognizing the centrality of the human person. For this reason, Leo XIV strongly calls for a genuine conversion of our gaze: seeing the migrant not as a phenomenon to be managed, but as a brother or sister to be encountered. Only from this personalist perspective does it become possible to address the root causes of migration and promote fairer policies capable of upholding both the right to migrate and the right not to be forced to do so.

The Holy Father's emphasis on migrants themselves, rather than on the phenomenon of migration, is therefore not accidental; it reflects a deliberate pastoral and moral choice. Through this approach, he seeks to counter a widespread narrative that tends to describe migration primarily in terms of numbers, flows, and pressure on borders. Indeed, the term "migration flows" often belongs to bureaucratic and geopolitical discourse, risking the transformation of a human tragedy into a matter that is essentially logistical – something to be controlled, directed, or contained. Speaking of migrants, in contrast, means restoring a face, a story, and dignity to those who undertake the journey of migration.

The distinction is not merely terminological but deeply cultural and political. When the debate focuses on flows, attention tends to shift toward borders and control mechanisms; when, however, the migrant as a person is placed at the centre, the dimensions of relationship, encounter, and shared responsibility inevitably come to the fore. Viewed in this light, one can also understand the meaning Pope Leo XIV attributes to integration, describing it as a reciprocal process involving both the host community and those who arrive. On the one hand, he calls for opening up spaces for welcome and participation; on the other, he encourages migrants to learn the laws, respect fundamental values, and actively contribute to the life of the society that welcomes them.

Integration does not mean erasing the history of those who arrive or demanding that they leave behind everything that is part of their memory. Nor does it mean creating parallel worlds, closed off from one another, where people live side by side without truly encountering one another. Integration is a reciprocal journey: those who arrive learn to inhabit a new land, and those who welcome them learn to expand their own homes without diluting their identity or closing their hearts to the encounter. To you, dear migrant brothers and sisters, a noble and necessary part of this journey belongs: to open yourselves with trust to the community that welcomes you, to learn its language, to respect its laws, to get to know its customs, to participate in communal life and to offer your gifts with gratitude. [Leo XIV, 2026g]

By choosing to rarely use the detached vocabulary of institutions, the Holy Father compels us to look people in the eye, making it much harder to look the other way. Shifting the discourse from "flows" to "migrants" means rejecting the "dehumanization" of the phenomenon. And here, too, we cannot fail to notice how the baton has been taken up from the teachings of Pope Francis:

Let us pray for these our brothers and sisters who met their deaths in our Mediterranean in recent years. And let us also pray that we may be saved from another kind of shipwreck taking place: the shipwreck of civilization, which threatens not only migrants but us all. How can we save ourselves from this shipwreck that risks sinking the ship of our civilization? By conducting ourselves with kindness and humanity. By regarding people

not merely as statistics, as Siriman told us, for what they are: people, men and women, brothers and sisters, each with his or her own life story. [Francis, 2022]

Continuity with the magisterium of Pope Francis is also evident in the Holy Father's journeys to places that symbolize these migration routes: from his powerful appeal in the Canary Islands in June 2026 – where he reminded us that we are all migrants – to his July 2026 visit to Lampedusa, a location chosen as an emblematic site to pay tribute to those who lost their lives at sea.

The Freedom to Migrate and to Stay

A third theme in Leo XIV's teaching on migrants is the freedom to migrate and the freedom to stay – two deeply interconnected rights that shed light on one another. The Holy Father reminds us that the freedom to migrate stems from the recognition that every person has the right to seek dignified living conditions when their existence is threatened by war, hunger, persecution, violence, extreme poverty, or the effects of the climate crisis. When a person is forced to leave their home to survive, they cannot be treated merely as a problem to be turned away. They retain a dignity that transcends all borders and legal statuses. For this reason, the Pope calls for safe and legal pathways, as well as rescue, protection, welcome, advancement, and integration.

The Pontiff also insists upon the freedom to stay. No one should be compelled to leave. The right to migrate must not become a pretext for accepting a world where millions are driven from their homelands because they find no peace, security, work, justice, or future there. The Pope thus highlights the responsibility of countries of origin, transit, and destination – and of the entire international community – to create conditions allowing everyone to live with dignity in their own home, without being forced to entrust their lives to traffickers or embark on deadly journeys. It is unjust to allow entire peoples to be deprived of the opportunity to build their future in the land of their birth. True justice goes beyond merely managing arrivals; it addresses the root causes that force people to leave. Leo XIV therefore calls for a shift in perspective. In the Encyclical Letter *Magnifica Humanitas*, the Pontiff articulates this dual right:

A litmus test for social justice today is the treatment of migrants, refugees and those forced to move due to poverty, violence, climate change and environmental disasters. [...] Social justice in this area entails at least two complementary commitments. On the one hand, this means protecting the rightful hopes of those forced to leave by ensuring safe and legal routes, dignified conditions for receiving them, and genuine pathways to integration. On the other hand, it means promoting the right to remain in one's homeland in peace and security by addressing the root causes that force people to migrate, including those linked to economic injustices and the climate crisis. When these rights are respected, migration

can become an opportunity for encounter and mutual enrichment among peoples. [Leo XIV, 2026a:81]

When faced with migrants, it is not enough to ask how to contain or manage a phenomenon; we must ask ourselves: «What kind of world have we built, if so many brothers and sisters must risk death in search of life?» [Leo XIV, 2026c].

In the dual assertion of the freedom to migrate and the freedom to stay, Leo XIV aligns closely with the statement made by Pope Francis in his message for the 2023 World Day of Migrants and Refugees:

The decision to migrate should always be free, yet in many cases, even in our day, it is not. Conflicts, natural disasters, or more simply the impossibility of living a dignified and prosperous life in one's native land are forcing millions of persons to leave. Already in 2003, Saint John Paul II stated that "as regards migrants and refugees, building conditions of peace means in practice being seriously committed to safeguarding first of all the right not to emigrate, that is, the right to live in peace and dignity in one's own country." (Francis, 2023)

The direct reference to John Paul II helps us discover the extent to which the right not to have to emigrate – which precedes the right to migrate – is deeply rooted in the teachings of previous pontiffs.

By means of a farsighted local and national administration, more equitable trade and supportive international cooperation, it is possible for every country to guarantee its own population, in addition to freedom of expression and movement, the possibility to satisfy basic needs such as food, health care, work, housing and education; the frustration of these needs forces many into a position where their only option is to emigrate.

Equally, the right to emigrate exists. This right, Pope John XXIII recalls in the Encyclical *Mater et Magistra*, is based on the universal destination of the goods of this world (cf. nn. 30 and 33). It is obviously the task of Governments to regulate the migratory flows with full respect for the dignity of the persons and for their families' needs, mindful of the requirements of the host societies. In this regard, international Agreements already exist to protect would-be emigrants, as well as those who seek refuge or political asylum in another country. There is always room to improve these agreements. [John Paul II, 2004]

Welcoming, protecting, promoting, and integrating

The magisterium of Leo XIV revisits a theme dear to Pope Francis: welcoming, protecting, promoting, and integrating as a response to the challenges posed by contemporary migration.

The Church's tradition of working for and with migrants continues, and today this service is expressed in initiatives such as refugee reception centres, border missions, and the efforts of Caritas Internationalis and other institutions. Contemporary teaching clearly

reaffirms this commitment. Pope Francis has recalled that the Church's mission to migrants and refugees is even broader, insisting that "our response to the challenges posed by contemporary migration can be summed up in four verbs: welcome, protect, promote and integrate" [Leo XIV, 2025b:75]

These four verbs were first presented by Pope Francis at the International Forum on Migration and Peace [Francis, 2017], held in Rome in 2017, and were subsequently reiterated in the Message for the 2018 World Day of Migrants and Refugees [Francis, 2018]: "welcoming, protecting, promoting, and integrating migrants and refugees."

As his predecessor had done, the Holy Father sees in these verbs a synthesis of joint action involving public institutions, civil society, and the Church—a synergistic effort representing an effective response to the manifold challenges posed by the migration phenomenon in the short, medium, and long term:

From this far-flung corner of Europe on the Mediterranean Sea, one can more clearly perceive the momentous challenge that the phenomenon of migration poses to European societies. In this regard, just as with the ecological transition and the promotion of peace, Europe possesses a unique potential, stemming from its history and culture, and therefore bears a corresponding responsibility. Thanks to its geographical location and institutional framework, Europe is capable of addressing the crisis — in this region — in a comprehensive manner, integrating immediate relief efforts into a long-term strategic plan capable of receiving, protecting, supporting and integrating migrants, while at the same time assisting developing countries so that no one is forced to emigrate. All of this must be done with vigilance, ensuring respect for the dignity of every person. This is a task not only for public institutions but also for civil society as a whole and for the Church. [Leo XIV, 2026d]

Human Traffickers

A fifth theme that can be highlighted in Leo XIV's magisterium regarding migrants concerns the denunciation of human traffickers. The words spoken by the Holy Father in Tenerife on 12 June 2026 are unequivocal:

From this square, I wish to address a clear message to those who take advantage of people's desperation, to those who organize death routes, traffic in human beings, withhold documents, exploit workers, threaten women, deceive families and turn the suffering of others into a business. Stop. Repent (cf. Mk 1:15). The tears and blood of these brothers and sisters cry out to God, and their suffering reaches him (cf. Gen 4:10; Ex 3:7–9). The money wrested from the vulnerability of the poor will bring neither peace, nor honor, nor a future (cf. Jer 22:13; Jam 5:1–6). [Leo XIV, 2026g]

In Lampedusa, Leo XIV calls traffickers "robbers," comparing them to those in the Parable of the Good Samaritan:

Dear friends, today Lampedusa and Linosa lie along a path as dangerous as the one that led down from Jerusalem to Jericho (cf. v. 30). Here you have seen not just one, but thousands of human beings fall into the hands of robbers who have taken everything from them, beat them brutally, and walked away, leaving them half-dead (cf. Lk 10:30). [Leo, 2026d]

This stance of firm condemnation taken by Leo XIV demonstrates that, for the Church, the battle against human trafficking is not merely a social issue, but an inextricable theological and Gospel imperative. By exposing the demonic and predatory nature of those who profit from the misery of others – likened at times to the biblical monsters of the abyss or the bandits of the Gospel – the Pontiff strips away any moral alibi from the perpetrators and from general indifference.

In biblical language, the sea can symbolize threat, darkness, and chaos. It is the realm of Leviathan, a figure of devouring power, and Rahab, a name evoking the arrogance of forces that rise up against God and against life (cf. Ps 74:13-14; 89:10-11; Is 27:1; 51:9; Job 26:12). Today, too, monsters roam these seas: mafias that traffic in desperation, traffickers who enslave women and children, and the indifference of many that allows the poor to be swallowed up by exploitation or oblivion. [Leo XIV, 2026c]

The Holy Father's denunciation – imbued with both sternness and a fervent hope for the conversion of hearts – thus resonates as a courageous and prophetic call: to restore the centrality of divine justice and the inalienable dignity of every human life, so that the seas and borderlands may cease to be scenes of death and become, once again, spaces of encounter and salvation.

According to Leo XIV, conversion for traffickers must translate into a series of reparative actions benefiting their victims:

Break those chains and set free those whom you hold under your dominion (cf. Is 58:6). Restore what you have taken and make amends as best you can. Turn back while there is still time, for God's mercy can reach even the most hardened sinner, yet it enters only through the narrow gate of truth, justice, and conversion (cf. Ez 33:11). [Leo XIV, 2026g]

The denunciation by Leo XIV reaffirms what his predecessor stated regarding trafficking and the criminals who engage in the trade of human beings – glaring examples of the widespread tendency to commodify the other:

Human trafficking must be counted among the most dramatic manifestations of this commodification. In its many forms, it constitutes a wound in the body of contemporary humanity, a deep gash in the humanity of both those who suffer it and those who perpetrate it. Indeed, trafficking disfigures the victim's humanity, violating their freedom and dignity. Yet, at the same time, it dehumanizes the perpetrator, denying them access to "life in abundance." Finally, trafficking gravely harms humanity as a whole, tearing apart the human family and even the Body of Christ. [Francis, 2021]

Migrants challenge the Church.

The pastoral challenge posed to the Church by contemporary migration represents another significant theme in the magisterium of Leo XIV. The Church cannot remain indifferent to migrants, refugees, victims of trafficking, and those who undertake perilous migration routes. Their cry directly challenges the faith. The Church is called to recognize Christ present in these people. For this reason, the Pope insists on a Church that allows itself to be disturbed by reality – one that does not "pass by" the boats, the shipwrecks, the exploitation, and the exile.

What emerges is the image of a Church that walks with those who walk, that proclaims Christ without imposing Him, and that simultaneously receives the Gospel from the hands of the poor. Migration thus becomes not only a pastoral challenge but also a call to ecclesial conversion: the Church evangelizes when it welcomes and is evangelized by those it welcomes.

The Church, too, must allow itself to be challenged. Welcoming the migrant cannot be a secondary matter, nor can it be delegated solely to a few volunteers. We kneel before the altar to adore Christ present in the Eucharist, from whom we receive the strength and motivation to live out charity; therefore, we cannot then "pass by" the canoes and dinghies, for all service springs from prayer, and all commitment returns to it (cf. Lk 10:31-32). [Leo XIV, 2026c]

Welcoming the many brothers and sisters who come from afar is not a secondary task to be delegated to volunteers or specialized organizations. It is intrinsically part of the mission of the entire Christian community, for it is Christ who knocks at the door: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Mt 25:35). Encountering the migrant is encountering Christ – an essential element of the Christian vocation. Yet, to bring about this encounter, one must move; one must "journey."

This journeying is directly linked to the "Church that goes forth" – a concept so dear to Pope Francis – a Church unafraid to leave its comfort zone to encounter Christ in the existential peripheries. And, as the Holy Father explains, it is not so much a matter of "setting out" as it is of "staying":

While for a long time we associated mission with "setting out" – journeying to distant lands that had not yet heard the Gospel or were mired in poverty – today the frontiers of mission are no longer geographical; rather, poverty, suffering, and the longing for a greater hope are coming to us. [...] It is not so much a matter of "setting out" as of "staying" to proclaim Christ through welcome, compassion, and solidarity: staying without retreating into the comfort of our own individualism; staying to look into the faces of those arriving from distant, war-torn lands; staying to open our arms and hearts to them, to welcome them as brothers and sisters, and to be a source of consolation and hope for them. [Leo XIV, 2025c]

Migrants as Evangelizers

A sixth recurring theme in the teachings of Leo XIV is the evangelizing mission carried out by Catholic migrants in their host countries. This often serves to renew and revitalize communities with long-standing Christian traditions—communities that, due to secularism, are becoming increasingly weary and spiritually barren.

At the same time, we cannot forget the many migrants from Latin America, the Philippines and other parts of the world who are already a living part of the community. Through their faith, work and gifts, they help to renew the community. Let yourselves also be evangelized by them, for they surely bring with them gifts that Providence has wished to send to you through those who are integrating. [Leo XIV, 2026g]

According to the Holy Father, the very act of assisting migrants can become an opportunity for evangelization for those who dedicate themselves to their cause: «The greatest grace is allowing ourselves to be evangelized by those we help, recognizing the mysterious wisdom of God written in their very flesh» [Leo XIV, 2026h]. Here, too, we find a strong connection to what Pope Francis has proposed in the context of the synodal journey: «Francis’s insistence on a synodal Church—a Church that “walks together,” that seeks to read the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel, and that allows itself to be evangelized by the poor with whom it shares its history» [Leo XIV, 2026a:42].

The evangelizing work of Catholic migrants also serves as an initial proclamation of the Gospel in countries where the Good News is not yet known. Their presence in settings characterized by diverse faiths often becomes a favourable opportunity to initiate interreligious dialogue built upon the witness of their lives and fraternal relationships.

In particular, Catholic migrants and refugees can today become missionaries of hope in their host countries, pioneering new paths of faith where the message of Jesus Christ has not yet reached, or initiating interreligious dialogues rooted in everyday life and the pursuit of shared values. [Leo XIV, 2025d]

From this perspective, the migrant is not merely or exclusively the recipient of pastoral care but becomes an active agent in the work of evangelization. This is not a new phenomenon linked to modern-day migration, but a recurring element in the history of the Church, as John Paul II aptly highlighted in 1989:

From the very beginning, many migrants have played a valuable role. It was migrants who were the first missionaries to support and assist the work of the Apostles in the regions of Judea and Samaria. Migration, as a vehicle for the faith, has been a constant in the history of the Church and the evangelization of entire countries. Often, at the origins of Christian communities that flourish today, we find small colonies of migrants who, under the guidance of a priest, gathered in humble churches to hear the Word of God and ask Him for the courage to face the trials and sacrifices of their arduous situation. [John Paul II, 1989]

Biblical references

Two Gospel references emerge with particular prominence in Pope Leo XIV's speeches on migration—both cited six times: the Final Judgment in Matthew 25:31–46 and the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30–37). These two texts serve as a key to interpreting his magisterium regarding human mobility.

In the passage from Matthew, Christ identifies with those suffering from hunger, thirst, sickness, imprisonment, and—significantly—the status of a stranger. Welcoming the migrant, therefore, appears not merely as an ethical or humanitarian imperative, but as a privileged space for encountering the Lord. In the face of those forced to leave their homeland, the believer is invited to recognize the very presence of Christ. The issue of migration is thus lifted out of a purely social or political context and restored to its deeper Gospel dimension.

The parable of the Good Samaritan completes and gives concrete expression to this perspective. Faith proves itself authentic when it becomes closeness to others—when it translates into concrete acts of care and compassion. It is not enough simply to notice another person's suffering; one must allow oneself to be challenged, pause on one's journey, share the burden of the wound, and accept responsibility for it. The migrant is a brother or sister, and each of us is called to decide whether to pass by or to become a neighbour.

The two Gospel passages thus converge on a unified message. On the one hand, Matthew 25 affirms that it is Christ himself who meets us in the stranger; on the other, the Good Samaritan teaches that this encounter demands a concrete response of mercy. Welcoming others thus ceases to be an abstract principle and becomes a personal responsibility, a communal choice, and a Gospel witness.

A third, particularly significant biblical reference—cited three times—is the exhortation found in the Letter to the Hebrews: «Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels» (Heb 13:2). Through this biblical reference, the Holy Father proposes an understanding of welcome that goes beyond a mere response to a humanitarian emergency. Indeed, hospitality becomes a space for revelation, encounter, and blessing.

Those who offer welcome do not merely perform an act of solidarity toward a vulnerable person; they enter into a relationship capable of transforming both parties. The migrant is not presented solely as a recipient of aid, but as the bearer of a story, a culture, a faith, and a hope that can enrich the welcoming community. From this perspective, Gospel hospitality is not a one-way movement of assistance, but a human and spiritual exchange in which each person receives something from the other. Fear and mistrust thus give way

to mutual recognition, while the Christian community discovers that, by opening itself to the stranger, it also opens itself to the surprising action of God.

Finally, the reference to the “better homeland” – the heavenly one evoked by the Letter to the Hebrews (Heb 11:16), cited on three occasions – introduces a deeply spiritual perspective on the condition of being migrants and pilgrims that is shared by every human being. On the occasion of the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States of America, Leo XIV observed that the celebration of one’s earthly homeland can become an opportunity to turn one’s gaze toward the heavenly one [Leo XIV, 2026i]. This is not a matter of diminishing the value of belonging to a nation, a land, or a tradition, but rather of situating these realities within a broader horizon: that of humanity’s pilgrimage toward God.

In this light, every person appears as a pilgrim in history, called to live out their various forms of belonging without absolutizing them, and to transform them into spheres of responsibility, fraternity, and service. The experience of migrants thus takes on particular significance: through the act of leaving, the search for a new home, and the hope for a better future, they remind the Church and the world of an essential truth of the Christian faith. No earthly reality encompasses the fullness of human destiny. We are all journeying toward a definitive homeland where no one will be a stranger, and all will be welcomed as daughters and sons.

Mention must also be made of two references to the story of the Holy Family in exile in Egypt – an icon for all of today’s forced migrants:

The Holy Family of Nazareth, which had to flee to Egypt to protect the life of the Child Jesus (cf. Mt 2:13–15), remains for all time a model and refuge for every refugee family, every migrant and every person forced to leave their homeland out of fear, persecution or necessity (cf. Pius XII, Apostolic Constitution *Exsul Familia*). [Leo XIV, 2026g].

Conclusion

Time constraints have prevented me from developing other important themes emerging from Leo XIV’s magisterium regarding migrants – themes that undoubtedly merit further exploration. By way of example, I will simply mention two: a) the need to balance security, hospitality, and integration; and b) the need to move beyond an “emergency” mindset by building common, long-term policies.

Regarding the topics addressed in this contribution, it is also worth noting that the observations presented here cover a necessarily limited timeframe: the early months of a pontificate that is still in its initial stages. We are, in fact, witnessing a living, dynamic line of thought destined to evolve further through the Holy Father’s magisterium and pastoral action.

From the words and actions of Leo XIV, the cornerstone of his teaching on migrants emerges with remarkable clarity: the unconditional recognition of the dignity of every migrant, grounded in Christian anthropology and the Gospel vision of the human person. Stemming from this conviction is the choice to focus first and foremost on the faces, stories, and aspirations of individuals, avoiding any reduction of the migration phenomenon to mere flows or emergency-driven logic.

Safeguarding human dignity entails recognizing a dual and inseparable right: the right to migrate safely, in an orderly manner, and with dignity, and – simultaneously – the right to remain in one's own land without being forced to leave. This perspective calls, on the one hand, for a clear denunciation of the criminal networks that exploit people's vulnerability and desperation and, on the other, for a renewed commitment to translating the four verbs highlighted by Pope Francis – welcome, protect, promote, and integrate – into concrete pastoral and social actions.

In this context, the Church is called not only to care for migrants but also to allow itself to be challenged, enriched, and evangelized by their presence. Indeed, they are not merely recipients of assistance or pastoral accompaniment but active participants in the life of the Church – bearers of gifts, faith, hope, and new opportunities for the renewal of our communities.

Just over a year into his pontificate, it is evident that the path undertaken by Pope Leo XIV represents more than just an initial chronological phase; it already outlines a clearly defined magisterial direction. It is a coherent and deeply Gospel-centred vision of migration, capable of harmonizing realism with prophecy, and personal concern with shared responsibility.

Rather than offering contingent answers to immediate problems, this teaching invites an ongoing conversion of vision and heart, calling for fidelity to the Gospel and affirming the centrality of human dignity. It is on this ground that the credibility of the Church's mission is measured, as well as the ethical and spiritual quality of our societies and the civilization we intend to build for future generations.

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