

Message from Bishop Hanna

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In this year's Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees Pope Benedict XVI recalls a very powerful image found in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*: "the Church goes forward together with humanity". He describes how the images of the pilgrimage are very much a part of the Catholic social teaching aimed at promoting the dignity of every human being in whatever circumstance or whatever place. As John Paul II said, "We are dealing with each individual, since each one is included in the mystery of Redemption, and through this mystery Christ has united himself with each one for ever. It follows that the Church cannot abandon man, and that this man is the primary route that the Church must travel in fulfilling her mission ... the way traced out by Christ himself, the way that leads invariably through the mystery of the Incarnation and the Redemption". (*Centesimus Annus*, 53).

I would like to reflect on the dignity of the human person who sets out on a pilgrimage to another land and how this pilgrimage is marked by faith and hope. I am thinking of the thousands upon thousands of people who, for various reasons choose to come to Australia to fulfil their faith and hope; much more, I am thinking of the most recent arrivals and those who more acutely live the phenomenon of forced migration and look for a place of welcome, peaceful living and dignified opportunities.

Pope Benedict describes migration as "a striking phenomenon because of the sheer number of people involved, the social, economic, political, cultural and religious problems it raises and the dramatic challenges it poses to nations and the international community" (*Caritas in Veritate*, 62). At the centre of this striking phenomenon there is the human person "for every migrant is a human person who, as such, possesses fundamental, inalienable

rights that must be respected by every one in every circumstance" (*ibid.*).

World, regional and local conflicts, engender inequality, poverty, oppression, unemployment, lack of food, illness. To these, we add an impressive number of people who fear for their lives and are persecuted because of race, ethnic identity, faith and belief, for such are the "grief and anguish of the people of our times, especially of those who are poor and afflicted" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1). These are the reasons why people move from their homes in search of better lives. Indeed they do so with much grief and anguish in their hearts, but their journey away from home is also sustained by "faith and hope". Many people in this situation are sustained by the hope that something is going to change for the better. People living in desperate situations challenge the comfort of those who take freedom, work, education, peace, security and other fundamental goods for granted and do not need to hope for such basic rights in life.





Dear brothers and sisters

who yourselves are migrants,

may this World Day help you renew your trust

and hope in the Lord who is always at our side

Benedictus PP. XVI

How can the lives of so many people fulfil the right and just quest for faith and hope?

One may choose two ways to approach this question.

1. One is to dwell on the responsibilities held by Governments and International Organisations.

The root causes of migration such as inequality, conflicts and oppression create the need to not only escape, but to merely survive. Although the universal right to migrate must be guaranteed and protected, no one should be forced to migrate. We, in Australia, do not experience interminable conflicts and ongoing oppression and therefore do not feel the need to migrate or to jump on boats and reach for other shores.

Some people have suggested the need to develop better dialogue and to address the governance of those responsible for people affected by the necessity of migration. There is, too, a need to promote cooperation between countries of origin stricken by dramatic challenges, and the receiving countries perceived as places where justice and peace allow for hopeful futures. This situation is possible, but it presumes that the dignity of the human person with inalienable rights, be upheld

as a non-negotiable first priority at both the origin and destination. Very sadly, what we see instead, are people crying out for protection from conflict and despair, while receiving countries toughen measures to secure their borders for their own protection and well-being.

Australia is a receiving country, and we speak of regional cooperation and a global awareness of interdependence and inter-responsibility among peoples and nations. Australia was instrumental in drafting the Refugee Convention and is a signatory to the original document. Now, on a pathway marked by particular political ideologies and interests, these, and not the spirit of the Convention, are in fact determining the criteria for the application of international treaties. As a matter of fact, Australia has children in detention and applies mandatory and indefinite detention laws on people who arrive by boat. "Certainly, every state has the right to regulate migration and to enact policies dictated by the general requirements of the common good", (World Day for Migrants and Refugees, 99 Message, 2013), but the obligation to protect and the fundamental right to seek asylum can never be denied to people in fear of their lives, nor should they be incarcerated for needing help.

Australia has provided many opportunities for "people who have come across the sea" (National Anthem). From all countries people have come to Australia seeking to fulfil their hopes and strengthen their faith. Australia has been enriched by these people many of whom hail from countries torn by war, famine and sheer poverty. Today, people keep on coming "across the seas". The devastating images of their lives at the mercy of rickety old fishing boats challenge the sense of what it means to be human. Yet we present these asylum seekers, including many children and unaccompanied minors, with the prospect of a crammed detention place in which they could be held for years.



A displaced Iraqi family in Al-Qalaat settlement, east of Mosul. Around 11,000 people are living in an old castle formerly used by the Iraqi Army as a prison

2. Another way is to ask: “what can I do?” How am I responsible for this migrant or person asking for asylum?

To have the courage to question ourselves and our relationship with the other, with the stranger, with the one who comes from a place I don't know and from a culture I am not familiar with, is, in fact, to have the courage to question our own identity. There are experiences, though, that are common to every person. Among them is that of being on a journey and being a foreigner. Every person, at one point or another, has found him/herself on a journey and has come to places feeling out of place – a foreigner. Travelling to a foreign place with a foreign language and culture we find ourselves out of our comfort zone and forced to ask for help. We cannot readily forget the experience of how difficult it was communicating our needs and how enthusiastic we were when welcome and acceptance were afforded to us.

To reflect on migration as a pilgrimage is to come to the realisation that migrants and refugees move away from home with faith and hope, for “faith and hope are inseparable in the hearts of migrants” and refugees. As Catholics in Australia, we are called to reflect on ways we become instruments of faith and hope for migrants and refugees.

The Catholic Church proclaims Gospel values which promote pastoral care. It is the duty of the Catholic community to shift the level of the discussion on migrants and refugees away from debate about perceived economic liabilities and national security to points which focus on the ethical dimension. The Church seeks to focus on the good of the person and one's inalienable rights. The respect due to migrants and refugees carries a heavy responsibility to walk alongside migrants and refugees providing effective means of hope and faith.

In the climate of our times it is necessary to renew our familiarity with the teaching of the Church on matters of migration, and confront the challenge of providing pastoral care to migrants and refugees as a concrete way to

implement the relevant teaching. Witnessing the poverty and suffering migrants and refugees must endure in their pilgrimage heightens the awareness that calls us to be active. Individuals, parishes, ethnic chaplaincies and our Catholic agencies must initiate programs of awareness aimed at making the causes of migration known; an effective response will reach out to local Members of Parliament and people at every level of government. The Church must not forget the religious dimension of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, for this is fundamental for every person's life. Indeed, “it is to this dimension that the Church, by virtue of her mission entrusted to her by Christ himself, must devote special attention and care: this is her most important and specific task” (World Day for Migrants and Refugees, 99 Message, 2013).

Migrants and refugees do not come to our shore empty-handed. On the contrary, they come filled with faith and hope. In many cases they come from young and vibrant Catholic communities and some of them have had pastoral responsibilities such as catechists in their homeland. We are called to enable them to share with us the richness of their faith and what they suffered for the sake of Christ.

In conclusion, hope is a major force of motivation driving refugees to endure and continue their journey. They look to us as people who can help fulfil their legitimate hopes. They have faith that Australia will offer a safe place and provide their family and children a decent opportunity to live a dignified life. In this Year of Faith, we pray that the hope and faith which migrants place in us will inspire our commitment to reach out and to create communities united in the communion of one faith and one hope.

Yours sincerely in Christ



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