

1999

Message

On the Threshold of the New Millennium

For The World Migration Day 2000

John Paul II

21 November 1999

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

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1. On the threshold of the new millennium, humanity is marked by phenomena of intense mobility, while the awareness of being members of one family continues to grow in people's minds. Voluntary or forced migration increases opportunities for exchange among people of different cultures, religions, races and nationalities. Modern means of transport are ever more rapidly connecting one part of the globe to another, and every day borders are crossed by thousands of migrants, refugees, nomads and tourists.

The immediate reasons for the complex reality of human migration differ widely; its ultimate source, however, is the longing for a transcendent horizon of justice, freedom and peace. In short, it testifies to an anxiety which, however indirectly, refers to God, in whom alone man can find the full satisfaction of all his expectations.

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Many countries make a considerable effort to welcome immigrants, many of whom, after overcoming the difficulties of adjustment, are well integrated into the host community. However, the misunderstandings that foreigners sometimes experience show the urgent need for a transformation of structures and a change of mentality, which is what the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 asks of Christians and every person of good will.

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2. With the Great Jubilee the Church celebrates the Birth of Christ. In order deeply to live this time of grace, many of the faithful will go on pilgrimage to the shrines of the Holy Land, Rome and the whole world, where they will learn to open their hearts to everyone, especially those who are different: guests, foreigners, immigrants, refugees, those who profess another religion and non-believers.

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Pilgrimages have always been a significant part of the life of the faithful, even though assuming different cultural forms in various ages, since "a pilgrimage evokes the believer's personal journey in the footsteps of the Redeemer: it is an exercise of practical asceticism, of repentance for human weaknesses, of constant vigilance over one's own frailty, of interior preparation for a change of heart" (*Incarnationis mysterium*, n. 7).

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For many pilgrims this experience of an interior journey is accompanied by the benefits of many encounters with other believers who differ in background, culture and history. A pilgrimage therefore becomes a privileged occasion for meeting others. Whoever has first made the effort, like Abraham, to leave his country, his kindred and his father's

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house (cf. *Gn.* 12: 1), is thereby more willing to open himself to those who are different.

A similar process occurs with migration which, by making people “come out of themselves”, can become an outreach to others and to other social contexts into which they can be integrated when the necessary conditions are created for peaceful coexistence. [144 1]

3. The Good News is the message of the Father’s infinite love revealed in Jesus Christ, who came into the world “to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad” (*Jn.* 11: 52) and unite them in the one human family in which God has made his dwelling (cf. *Rv.* 21: 3). This is why Pope Paul VI, in speaking of the Church, recalled that “there is no one who is a stranger to her heart, no one in whom her ministry has no interest. She has no enemies, except those who wish to be such. Her name of Catholic is not an idle title. Not in vain has she received the commission to foster in the world unity, love and peace” (Encyclical *Ecclesiam suam*, n. 94). [144 2]

Echoing these words, the Second Vatican Council stated: “That Messianic people, although it does not actually include all men, and at times may appear as a small flock, is, however, a most sure seed of unity, hope and salvation” (Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, n. 9). The Church is conscious of her mission. She knows that Christ wanted her to be a sign of unity in the world. It is from this perspective that she also considers the phenomenon of migration, which occurs today the context of globalization with all its positive and negative aspects (cf. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America*, nn. 20-22). [144 3]

On the one hand, globalization accelerates flows of capital and exchanges of goods and services between people and inevitably influences human movement. Every important event that occurs in a specific part of the world tends to have repercussions on the entire planet, while the sense that all nations share a common destiny is increasing. The new generations have a growing conviction that the planet is now a “global village”, and they make friendships that transcend the differences of language or culture. Living side by side is becoming an everyday reality for many people. [144 4]

At the same time, however, globalization produces new ruptures. Within the framework of a liberalism without adequate controls, the gap between the “emerging” and the “losing” countries is widening. The former have capital and technologies that allow them to enjoy the world’s resources at will, a possibility that they do not always use with a spirit of solidarity and sharing. The latter, instead, do not have easy access to the resources needed for adequate human development, and sometimes even lack the means of subsistence; crushed by debt and torn by internal divisions, they often end up wasting their meagre wealth on war (cf. Encyclical *Centesimus annus*, n. 33). As I recalled in my Message for the 1998 World Day of Peace, the challenge of our time is to assure a globalization in solidarity, a globalization without marginalization (cf. n. 3). [144 5]

4. In many regions of the world today people live in tragic situations of instability and uncertainty. It does not come as a surprise that in such contexts the poor and the destitute make plans to escape, to seek a new land that can offer them bread, dignity and peace. This is the migration of the desperate: men and women, often young, who have no alternative than to leave their own country to venture into the unknown. Every day thousands of people take even critical risks in their attempts to escape from a life [144 6]

with no future. Unfortunately, the reality they find in host nations is frequently a source of further disappointment.

At the same time, States with a relative abundance tend to tighten their borders under pressure from a public opinion disturbed by the inconveniences that accompany the phenomenon of immigration. Society finds itself having to deal with the “clandestine”, men and women in illegal situations, without any rights in a country that refuses to welcome them, victims of organized crime or of unscrupulous entrepreneurs. [144 7]

On the threshold of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, as the Church acquires a renewed awareness of her mission at the service of the human family, this situation also raises some serious questions. The globalization process can be an opportunity, if cultural differences are accepted as an opportunity for meeting and dialogue, and if the unequal distribution of the world’s resources leads to a new awareness of the necessary solidarity which must unite the human family. If, on the contrary, inequalities increase, poorer populations are forced into the exile of desperation, while the wealthy countries find they are prisoners of an insatiable craving to concentrate the available resources in their own hands. [144 8]

5. Aware of the dramas but also of the opportunities inherent in the migration phenomenon and contemplating the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God, the Church prepares to cross the threshold of the third millennium” (*Incarnationis mysterium*, n. 1). In the Incarnation the Church recognizes God’s initiative in making “known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (*Eph* 1: 9-10). Christian commitment draws strength from Christ’s love, which is Good News for all human beings. [144 9]

In the light of this Revelation, the Church, Mother and Teacher, works so that every person’s dignity is respected, the immigrant is welcomed as a brother or sister, and all humanity forms a united family which knows how to appreciate with discernment the different cultures which comprise it. In Jesus, God came seeking human hospitality. This is why he makes the willingness to welcome others in love a characteristic virtue of believers. He chose to be born into a family that found no lodging in Bethlehem (cf. *Lk.* 2:7) and experienced exile in Egypt (cf. *Mt* 2:14). Jesus, who “had nowhere to lay his head” (*Mt* 8:20), asked those he met for hospitality. To Zacchaeus he said: “I must stay at your house today” (*Lk.* 19:5). He even compared himself to a foreigner in need of shelter: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me” (*Mt* 25:35). In sending his disciples out on mission, Jesus makes the hospitality they will enjoy an act that concerns him personally: “He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me” (*Mt* 10:40). [145 0]

In this Jubilee year and in the context of a human mobility that has expanded everywhere, his invitation to hospitality becomes timely and urgent. How can the baptized claim to welcome Christ if they close the door to the foreigner who comes knocking? “If anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?” (*1 Jn* 3:17). [145 1]

The Son of God became man to reach out to all, giving preference to the least ones, the outcast, the stranger. When he began his mission in Nazareth, he presented himself as the Messiah who proclaims the Good News to the poor, brings release to captives and [145 2]

restores sight to the blind. He came to proclaim a “year of the Lord’s favour” (cf. *Lk.* 4: 18), which is liberation and the beginning of a new era of brotherhood and solidarity.

“The Jubilee, “a year of the Lord’s favour’, characterizes all the activity of Jesus; it is not merely the recurrence of an anniversary in time” (*Apostolic Letter Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 11). Christ’s work, ever present in his Church, seeks to bring all who feel strangers into a new fraternal communion; and his disciples are called to make themselves the servants of this mercy, so that no one will be lost (cf. *Jn.* 6: 39). [145 3]

6. In celebrating the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, the Church does not want to forget the tragedies which have marked the century now drawing to a close: the bloody wars which have devastated the world, the deportations, extermination camps, “ethnic cleansing” and the hatred which has spread and continues to darken human history. [145 4]

The Church hears the suffering cry of all who are uprooted from their own land, of families forcefully separated, of those who, in the rapid changes of our day, are unable to find a stable home anywhere. She senses the anguish of those without rights, without any security, at the mercy of every kind of exploitation, and she supports them in their unhappiness. [145 5]

In all the societies of the world the figure of the exile, the refugee, the deportee, the clandestine, the migrant and the “street people” gives the Jubilee celebration a very concrete meaning, which for believers becomes a call to change their mentality and their life, in accordance with Christ’s appeal: “Repent, and believe in the Gospel” (*Mk* 1:15). [145 6]

In its highest and most demanding motivation, this call to conversion certainly includes the effective recognition of the rights of migrants: “It is urgent in their regard that one knows how to overcome a strictly nationalistic attitude to create a State which recognizes their right to emigration and encourages their integration.... It is the duty of all - and especially Christians - to work energetically to establish the universal brotherhood which is the indispensable basis of true justice and a condition for lasting peace” (Paul VI, Encyclical *Octogesima adveniens*, n. 17). [145 7]

Working for the unity of the human family means being committed to the rejection of all discrimination based on race, culture or religion as contrary to God’s plan. It means bearing witness to a fraternal life based on the Gospel, which respects cultural differences and is open to sincere and trustful dialogue. It includes the advancement of everyone’s right to be able to live peacefully in his own country, as well as attentive concern that in every State immigration laws be based on the recognition of fundamental human rights. [145 8]

May the Virgin Mary, who set out with haste to visit her cousin Elizabeth and, in receiving hospitality, rejoiced in God her Saviour (cf. *Lk.* 1: 39-47), sustain everyone who in this Jubilee year sets out with their hearts open to others, and help them to meet them as brothers and sisters, children of the same Father (cf. *Mt* 23:9). [145 9]

I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to all.

From the Vatican, 21 November 1999.

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http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/messages/migration/documents/hf_jpii_mes_21111999_world-migration-day-2000_en.html.
