

**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
FOR THE 95th WORLD DAY OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES (2009)**

Theme: *St Paul migrant, 'Apostle of the peoples'*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This year the theme of the Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees is: “*St Paul migrant, 'Apostle of the peoples'*”. It is inspired by its felicitous coincidence with the Jubilee Year I established in the Apostle's honour on the occasion of the 2,000th anniversary of his birth. Indeed, the preaching and mediation between the different cultures and the Gospel which Paul, “a migrant by vocation” carried out, are also an important reference point for those who find themselves involved in the migratory movement today.

Born into a family of Jewish immigrants in Tarsus, Cilicia, Saul was educated in the Hebrew and Hellenistic cultures and languages, making the most of the Roman cultural context. After his encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus (cf. Gal 1:13-16), although he did not deny his own “traditions” and felt both esteem and gratitude to Judaism and the Law (cf. Rm 9:1-5; 10:1; 2 Cor 11:22; Gal 1:13-14; Phil 3:3-6), he devoted himself without hesitation or second thoughts to his new mission, with courage and enthusiasm and docile to the Lord's command: “I will send you far away to the Gentiles” (Acts 22:21). His life changed radically (cf. Phil 3:7-11): Jesus became for him his *raison d'être* and the motive that inspired his apostolic dedication to the service of the Gospel. He changed from being a persecutor of Christians to being an Apostle of Christ.

Guided by the Holy Spirit, he spared no effort to see that the Gospel which is “the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rm 1:16) was proclaimed to all, making no distinction of nationality or culture. On his apostolic journeys, in spite of meeting with constant opposition, he first proclaimed the Gospel in the synagogues, giving prior attention to his compatriots in the diaspora (cf. Acts 18:4-6). If they rejected him he would address the Gentiles, making himself - an authentic “missionary to migrants” - as a migrant and an ambassador of Jesus Christ “at large” in order to invite every person to become a “new creation” in the Son of God (2 Cor 5:17).

The proclamation of the *kerygma* caused him to cross the seas of the Near East and to travel the roads of Europe until he reached Rome. He set out from Antioch, where he proclaimed the Gospel to people who did not belong to Judaism and where the disciples of Jesus were called “Christians” for the first time (cf. Acts 11:20, 26). His life and his preaching were wholly directed to making Jesus known and loved by all, for all persons are called to become a single people in him.

This is the mission of the Church and of every baptized person in our time too, even in the era of globalization; a mission that with attentive pastoral solicitude is also directed to the variegated universe of migrants - students far from home, immigrants, refugees, displaced people, evacuees - including for example, the victims of modern forms of slavery, and of human trafficking. Today too the message of salvation must be presented with the same approach as that of the Apostle to the Gentiles, taking into account the different social and cultural situations and special difficulties of each one as a consequence of his or her condition

as a migrant or itinerant person. I express the wish that every Christian community may feel the same apostolic zeal as St Paul who, although he was proclaiming to all the saving love of the Father (Rm 8:15-16; Gal 4:6) to “win more” (1 Cor 9:22) for Christ, made himself weak “to the weak... all things to all men so that [he] might by all means save some” (1 Cor 9:22). May his example also be an incentive for us to show solidarity to these brothers and sisters of ours and to promote, in every part of the world and by every means, peaceful coexistence among different races, cultures and religions.

Yet what was the secret of the Apostle to the Gentiles? The missionary zeal and passion of the wrestler that distinguished him stemmed from the fact that since “Christ [had] made him his own”, (Phil 3:12), he remained so closely united to him that he felt he shared in his same life, through sharing in “his sufferings” (Phil 3:10; cf. also Rm 8:17; 2 Cor 4:8-12; Col 1:24). This is the source of the apostolic ardour of St Paul who recounts: “He who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles” (Gal 1:15-16; cf. also Rm 15:15-16). He felt “crucified with” Christ, so that he could say: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20), and no difficulty hindered him from persevering in his courageous evangelizing action in cosmopolitan cities such as Rome and Corinth, which were populated at that time by a mosaic of races and cultures.

In reading the Acts of the Apostles and the Letters that Paul addressed to various recipients, we perceive a model of a Church that was not exclusive but on the contrary open to all, formed by believers without distinction of culture or race: every baptized person is, in fact, a living member of the one Body of Christ. In this perspective, fraternal solidarity expressed in daily gestures of sharing, joint participation and joyful concern for others, acquires a unique prominence. However, it is impossible to achieve this dimension of brotherly mutual acceptance, St Paul always teaches, without the readiness to listen to and welcome the Word preached and practised (cf. 1 Thes 1:6), a Word that urges all to be imitators of Christ (cf. Eph 5:1-2), to be imitators of the Apostle (cf. 1 Cor 11:1). And therefore, the more closely the community is united to Christ, the more it cares for its neighbour, eschewing judgment, scorn and scandal, and opening itself to reciprocal acceptance (cf. Rm 14:1-3; 15:7). Conformed to Christ, believers feel they are “brothers” in him, sons of the same Father (Rm 8:14-16; Gal 3:26; 4:6). This treasure of brotherhood makes them “practise hospitality” (Rm 12:13), which is the firstborn daughter of *agape* (cf. 1 Tm 3:2, 5:10; Ti 1:8; Phlm 17).

In this manner the Lord's promise: comes true: “then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters” (2 Cor 6:17-18). If we are aware of this, how can we fail to take charge of all those, particularly refugees and displaced people, who are in conditions of difficulty or hardship? How can we fail to meet the needs of those who are de facto the weakest and most defenceless, marked by precariousness and insecurity, marginalized and often excluded by society? We should give our priority attention to them because, paraphrasing a well known Pauline text, “God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God” (1 Cor 1:27).

Dear brothers and sisters, may the World Day for Migrants and Refugees, which will be celebrated on 18 January 2009, be for all an incentive to live brotherly love to the full without making any kind of distinction and without discrimination, in the conviction that anyone who needs us and whom we can help is our neighbour (cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, n. 15). May the

teaching and example of St Paul, a great and humble Apostle and a migrant, an evangelizer of peoples and cultures, spur us to understand that the exercise of charity is the culmination and synthesis of the whole of Christian life.

The commandment of love - as we well know - is nourished when disciples of Christ, united, share in the banquet of the Eucharist which is, par excellence, the sacrament of brotherhood and love. And just as Jesus at the Last Supper combined the new commandment of fraternal love with the gift of the Eucharist, so his “friends”, following in the footsteps of Christ who made himself a “servant” of humanity, and sustained by his Grace cannot but dedicate themselves to mutual service, taking charge of one another, complying with St Paul's recommendation: “bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal 6:2). Only in this way does love increase among believers and for all people (cf. 1 Thes 3:12).

Dear brothers and sisters, let us not tire of proclaiming and witnessing to this “Good News” with enthusiasm, without fear and sparing no energy! The entire Gospel message is condensed in love, and authentic disciples of Christ are recognized by the mutual love their bear one another and by their acceptance of all.

May the Apostle Paul and especially Mary, the Mother of acceptance and love, obtain this gift for us. As I invoke the divine protection upon all those who are dedicated to helping migrants, and more generally, in the vast world of migration, I assure each one of my constant remembrance in prayer and, with affection, I impart my apostolic Blessing to all.

From Castel Gandolfo, 24 August 2008

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