

1986

Message

**We Reflect Again on the Grave and
Painful Problems Involved in Migration**

For the World Day of Migrants 1986

John Paul II

15 August 1986

Venerable Brothers,

[1078]

Beloved sons and daughters of the Church!

1. The annual celebration of the World Day of the Migrant, bringing us to reflect once again on the condition of thousands of migrant brothers and on their often grave and painful problems, turns our gaze in a special way towards families involved in migration. We are faced with complex situations, difficult to resolve, which are found at the core of many problems and which constitute the most sensitive, acute and painful focus of the vast phenomenon of human migration. The family, in fact, seems to be the most fragile and vulnerable of structures and the point at which the most thorny and negative aspects of migration concentrates their attack. This is evident whether one considers the conditions which afflict families left behind by migrants or reflects on the difficulties of families which migrate as a compact unit or which are formed in foreign lands or, finally, if one thinks of the numerous problems which surface for those family units which result from the union of persons of different cultures, languages, religions and customs.

For all these reasons the family of the migrant constitutes a special phenomenon which is of interest to the Church because of the pastoral care she is obliged to offer all her members and specially those who find themselves in grave situations; all the more so because the condition of the families of migrants has profound repercussions both on the original ecclesial community and, maybe even more so, on the community where they arrive, are received and take root.

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I would like to dedicate my annual Message for the Day of the Migrant this time to the specific problems of the families of migrants.

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The Situation of the Migrant Family

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2. Migrants often find themselves in a paradoxical situation: obliged to make a courageous decision for the good of their family or the one they want to form, they find themselves deprived of the possibility of achieving their legitimate aspirations.

The family which has the vocation to transmit the values of life and love finds it difficult to live its mission in the context of human mobility precisely because of

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the migratory exodus which harms it in various ways.

While some families are reunited, one has to note the persistence and even the growth of conditions which force husbands and wives to live separated. Workers, and not only those seasonally employed and those without proper documents, are obliged to live for months and even years far from their wives who, as a consequence, have to assume unaccustomed roles. Couples are thus condemned to a separation which renders the migratory experience even more traumatic. More often migration entails the separation of children from their parents, the former being forced into a situation where they are deprived of a parental figure and are educated reflecting the behaviour patterns of elderly people who are not always capable of helping the younger generation to project itself into the future. [1083]

Even in the case of the migrant family, reunited after years of separation, the precarious state of their jobs often deeply affects the family situation of thousands of workers, with the consequent uncertainty of all their plans including those for the schooling of their children, plans which in themselves require a certain stability over a considerable period of time. [1084]

Besides, it is not only the precarious condition of their jobs that undermines the stability of migrant families. Not rarely they suffer discrimination: in housing, being lodged in run-down neighborhoods of large metropolises; in being denied participation on a socio-political level; in the marginalization of the migrant woman. Being employed in difficult work which is disdained by the natives, often means long hours of work and shifts which render the healthy and harmonious growth of the nuclear family very difficult. [1085]

These conditions can influence migrant families so that they do not open themselves to the society which receives them and refuse to assume responsibilities outside the confines of their narrow, private interests. Once the problem of subsistence has been solved after the initial difficulties, the migrant family is tempted to pursue only material and consumer values and to neglect the very important options of a cultural and spiritual nature. [1086]

With regard to the education of the children, the migrant family is often deprived of the possibility of transmitting its own language and culture: the parents thus become passive witnesses vis-a-vis a school system and a society which impose on their children ideals and values which are difficult to integrate into those of the family. This gives rise to a struggle which sometimes is resolved in the total and bitter capitulation of the parents or in the total separation of the children, who have imbibed a different culture which is impervious to the values of the parents. The situation of the families consigned to refugee camps is even more dramatic, because here it is impossible to plan the future of all the members of the family, as they are completely dependent of the good will of strangers. [1087]

A Reminder about the Duties of those Involved [1088]

3. This rapid glance at the conditions of the migrant family brings us to the consideration of those fundamental values, common to all persons of good will,

which should be encouraged so that they are gradually realized and continue to grow.

One of these, for example, is the unity of the couple and of the nuclear family and also the harmony of the mutual integration of the couple from a moral and affective point of view and with regard to the fruitfulness of their love; a harmony which requires the orderly growth of all members of the family, for the formation of self-confident individuals who are socially committed and which at the same time requires wide-ranging solidarity and readiness to make sacrifices. [1089]

Faith brings light and strength to this process which highlights and develops perfectly the innate values of the family, defined by Vatican II as the “Domestic Church”. These values impose clear-cut obligations on those who have the duty to foster the common good with regard to all who want to respond to the profound desires that the Creator has placed in the human heart. [1090]

The Church continues to stress that, under the rule of law, the protection of families, and especially of those of migrants and refugees which are burdened with special problems, constitutes an essential priority. The state should be the guarantor of equality of all in the eyes of the law and so should protect the fundamental rights of migrant and refugee families, avoiding all forms of discrimination with regard to jobs, housing, health, education and culture (Discourse to the Bishops of Calabria on their “ad limina” visit, 10th December 1981, *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, IV-2 [1981] pages 896-900). [1091]

The Church in her teaching continually insists on a policy which favours and gives priority to family reunion. John XXIII called the separation of families because of working conditions a “painful anomaly” and emphasized that “each one has the obligation to be aware of this situation and to do all in his power to eliminate it” (Radio Message of the World Refugee Year, 28th June 1959. AAS LI [1959] page 482). Emergency conditions which lead to the temporary separation of husband and wife should not become permanent because as I pointed out addressing workers in France at Saint-Denis, 31 May 1980, “man rather than mere production or profits (of interested groups) is the main object of labour legislation” (cf. *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, III-I, [1980], page 1567). [1092]

The Categorical divine command “man should not separate what God has united” is an implicit condemnation of a society which grants economic advantages at the cost of moral values. [1093]

The effort needed to overcome such “objectively difficult” situations (Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 77), must be made by all: Governments, social and economic groups and the migrants themselves. [1094]

Another duty of the society and of the State is to set up welcoming structures to inform and to give social security norms of the host migrant families to break out of their isolation and ignorance of the juridical, social, educational and social security norms of the host country with regard to family legislation. [1095]

The host country should also commit itself to policy of increasing outlets of all genuine cultural expressions, whether of locals or migrants, which exist within the nation's frontiers, because every family has the right to its own specific cultural identity (cf. Discourse to the Diplomatic Corps, 15th January 1983, *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, VI-I, [1983], pages 126 ff.). [1096]

Equal education opportunities should be accorded to children of migrants so that— having attained the same degree of efficiency— they can compete for jobs on an equal footing with local children. [1097]

Besides, housing policy should plan for a fair distribution of publicly financed housing without any discrimination. [1098]

Another grave injustice suffered by the migrant family is the refusal of family allowances to those workers whose children have stayed back in the country of origin. [1099]

These are some of the challenges offered to the receiving country by the presence of migrant and refugee families. The commitment to the realization of true equality for all and the will to protect the weaker sections of the community, which are often the targets of discrimination and racism, contribute towards the building of a more just and, consequently, more humane society. The countries of origin should in their turn plan adequate measures so that returning migrant families can reintegrate productively and that parents and children may not feel doubly discriminated against and be obliged to undertake another exodus. [1100]

Towards a programme of Pastoral Care of the Family [1101]

4. The Church, a “sacrament of salvation” for all men and for the whole man, defends the basic values of the family, going even outside the cultural model on which any particular family has been structured, and denounces the impediments placed in the way of their realization, postulating liberty of decision and movement and also the primary right to choice in education which pertains to the family itself: in this matter it must be affirmed that, in case of conflict between the society and the family, it is a basic principle that the rights of the latter must prevail.

Pastoral care should therefore keep constantly before its eyes the above-mentioned fundamental values and promote their development with firm action [1102]

When, as unfortunately occurs often, the members of a family are divided, the inconveniences must, on the one hand be eased, chiefly by activating the ecclesial community so that it assumes as its own the resultant problems, while on the other hand no effort must be spared so that any transitory situations may be overcome. [1103]

All efforts must be made so that the whole family is united and that the migrant family is granted the facilities it needs and which belong to it by right of its equality in human dignity and in the eyes of the law with local families. “Migrant families... should be able to find everywhere in the Church, their own home... Where possible they should be served by priest of their own rite, culture and language” (Apostolic [1104]

Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 77). Migrant families should be brought close to the ecclesial community where they reside, and the latter should be ready to help them in any eventual need while at the same time inviting them to take part in the life of the parish. The founding of a new family is a decisive moment for the future of the young people concerned and for the good of both civil and ecclesiastical society; it is a problem which in a certain sense is central to youth (cf. Apostolic Letter on the occasion of the International Youth Year, no. 10; *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, VIII-I, [1985] pages 820 ff.).

Abundant pastoral experience in migration teaches and underlines forcefully that future married couples should be enlightened about the different types of obstacles which will influence their union and chiefly about the positive factors which should enrich that same union which, in order to be strong, supposes a basic identity of views and the availability for the most complete adaptation possible to each other. Pastoral care should be precise, objective and clearly outlined. It should foresee that the major obstacles for those contracting marriage arise from differences of culture, education, religion and personal conviction. [1105]

The new Code of Canon Law entrusts to pastors of souls “the obligation to ensure that their ecclesial communities provide for the faithful the assistance by which the married state is preserved in its Christian character and develops in perfection” (Canon 1063); and points out that vital instruments in providing this help are preaching and catechesis, the personal preparation of future married couples, the fruitful liturgical celebration of the sacred rite and the continued support of the couple after the marriage has been celebrated. The observance of juridical norms and assiduous pastoral care—contemplated by the same Code—taken on special importance in migration, because of the variety of situations that it presents. [1106]

Mixed Marriages [1107]

5. In order to be united in one love it is necessary to love God with the same love. This criterion must be kept well in mind when dealing with marriages between believers and non-believers, between Catholics and those who are not baptized. If in countries where the majority are Catholics there is today a growing migrant element of non-Christians, it can be foreseen that, in the future, mixed marriages will give rise to ever more serious problems, specially if the Catholic partner will be obliged in the future to live in a country whose culture does not welcome the Christian faith but rather opposes it in doctrine, in legislation and in custom. Besides, migrants find themselves more exposed than other individuals or groups in being obliged to make decisions which involved relations between different cultures and religions.

An appropriate catechesis for those contemplating a mixed marriage will not limit itself to a few pre-matrimonial instructions, but should aim at forming persons who are religiously convinced and socially committed, who know the motives for their faith and hope, besides those of the conscience and the faith of others; who are committed to the service of the poor and of the whole community. [1108]

Conclusion [1109]

6. Family pastoral care in migration cannot be identical in all times and places. The forms that it assumes must take into account the situation of the migrant, his background, the society in which he lives and the real prospects that his condition offers.

The creativity and the zeal of missionaries and of other pastoral agents, under the guidance of their pastors, here find ample scope for action, always framed within the norms of the Church found in the new Code of Canon Law and in the various directives of episcopal conferences and of individual bishops. In the diversity of methods and of proposals, the fundamental common orientation must never be forgotten, which is that of fulfilling God's plan, who decreed that man and woman should form but one flesh (cf. Mt. 19:6) in the marriage bond and that they should reflect in the family the great mystery of the union between Christ and the Church (cf. Eph 5:32). [1110]

Young people preparing for marriage, married couples and families should be educated in mutual solidarity within the ecclesial community and in the context of society as a whole. Marriage and the family, even though they originate in a free and personal choice, always constitute a social reality and form an integral part of the ecclesial community. [1111]

The liturgy also can play an important role in this matter by placing the realities of the family at the center of its praise and thanksgiving. These are thus strengthened and held up the admiring attention of all, specially of young people. [1112]

In the sphere of the apostolate proper to the laity, the evangelization of the migrant family should not be forgotten; its members are called to evangelize and to be evangelized (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 52). They should be reminded that the religious and moral future of the domestic hearth rests mainly in their hands: if families accept evangelization, they will become in their turn instruments of evangelization for many others, favourably influencing the milieu in which they live and work. Even those families originating from mixed marriages are not exempted from the duty of announcing Christ to their children, rather they are invited to be the agents and builders of unity (cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 71, AAS LXVIII [1976] pages 60 ff.). [1113]

It is my wish that this Message find in those engaged in the phenomenon of migration an attentive audience and a generous response to its directives which flow from my affectionate paternal and pastoral solicitude. I impart to all my heartfelt special Blessing with a particular thought for those most in need, for the sick and for children, all living the difficult life of migrants. [1114]

Given at the Vatican on the 15th August 1986, Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, during the eighth year of my Pontificate.

Joannes Paulus PP. II

Source: *World Day of Migrants.” We Reflect Again on the Grave and Painful Problems Involved in Migration.”* OR-EE (September 29, 1986): 3-4.
