

1987

Message

Catholic Laity and Migration

For World Migrants' Day 1987

John Paul II

5 August 1987

Venerable Brothers,

[1115]

Dear Sons and Daughters of the Church!

The most significant event that characterizes the life of the Church during the current year is certainly the coming Synod of Bishops. It is an initiative destined to call the attention and to awaken the interest of all live forces in the Church and to mark a decisive step in making the laity aware of its vocation to spread and consolidate the Kingdom of God among men. The Church exists in order to evangelize. To all her members, Jesus addressed this invitation: "Go. Therefore, make disciples of all the nations" (Mt 28:19).

1. Migration and the announcing of the Good News

[1116]

Since the very beginning, the participation of the laity in the Mission of the Church in the various sociocultural situations of the time has represented one of the most fruitful ways in meeting the proposal of integral salvation brought by Christ. In this context, migration assumes particular importance, especially if we consider its role in the spread of Christianity during the first centuries. It would therefore be natural to take the cue from the subject of the coming Synod in formulating the annual Message for World Migrants' Day and reflect on the theme: "Catholic laity and Migration".

The commitment to alleviate the burden of suffering, of humiliation and poverty, that weighs heavily on the migrant is the responsibility of the Church as a whole. But, first of all, it is the duty of the laity because of the strong social implications that migration connotes. Specific tasks fall on the receiving society no less than on the individuals who are received.

[1117]

2. Dignity of the vocation and the mission of the laity

[1118]

Through Baptism, God calls every Christian, whatever his state may be, to have a personal relationship of friendship and familiarity with him. This calling comes in the form of an invitation to follow Christ who makes us children of God by communicating to us his Spirit, and makes us capable of behaving as such.

In this vocation, the dignity of man in itself, rooted in the image of God carved in

[1119]

him when he was created, finds a new and higher motivation, and its full manifestation. Each person is loved by God. No one is excluded from his Love. This is the principle of universal salvation that lies at the foot of the missionary anxiety of the Church and of the modern awareness, which tends towards the search for unity in the human family. This destroys all discrimination, brings about equality among peoples and imposes respect for the human person in whatever condition he may be. Each person must be loved, respected, defended and protected because of his relationship with Christ and with God. If this relationship is ignored or denied, then it will always be easy to find apparent valid reasons to justify discrimination, marginalization and the oppression of man.

The Gospel therefore, being a light placed on high, does not announce a reality confined to the intimate experience of the individual, but one that is to be translated into a commitment with respect to the external world. [1120]

3. Mission of the laity in receiving countries [1121]

Today, I am writing to you to express your commitment to the world of migration. It presents a great variety of pleas directed both to the receiving community as well as to migrants themselves.

Difficult problems are linked with migration, such as family recomposition, jobs, housing, schooling and social security. Individuals and lay associations are continuously putting their time and professional skill (doctors, lawyers, teachers, etc.) at the disposal of migrants. [1122]

a. Be committed in the process of humanizing society. [1123]

Jesus has wanted to prolong his presence among us in the precarious condition of the needy, among whom he explicitly includes migrants. In this way, he intends to stimulate man to an interrupted process of humanization, of himself and of his brothers. Christ is simultaneously both on the side of the one served as well as of the one who serves. Nourishing this faith means putting one's heart at the disposal of others.

b. Look for the right solutions. [1124]

Migrants' problems are often shared with the society in which they live. Everywhere, in fact, the problems of lodging, work, social security, etc, exist. But the precarious situation of the migrant enormously magnifies these common problems. It is the task of the authorities to provide: for the need, of the whole of society, earfully avoiding every possible discrimination to the disadvantage of migrants. But, besides this, migrant suffer from specific problems. Hence, it is the task of the laity to propose and solicit just solutions in the name of God and in the name of man. Rich countries cannot be disinterested in the migratory problem and much less close their frontiers or harden their laws, more so if the gap between the rich and the poor countries from which migration originates widens. It is necessary, instead to reflect and search for the most rigorous criteria of distributive justice applied on a worldwide scale, also, in defence of the universal good that is peace.

c. Facilitate the participation of migrants in the life of society. [1125]

Whatever the life situation of each one may be, everyone today feels involved in a strong trend which calls for participation, reflection and militancy due to the acquired awareness of his own dignity. It is important to take into account such awareness so that migrants' problems may have true and lasting solutions.

Such participation should be more evident and immediate in the sphere of the Church, wherein no one is a foreigner. In dying for all, in fact, Christ abolished the barriers that divide Greek from Jews, slave from freeman (cf. Gal. 3:28). Migration offers the individual local Churches the occasion to verify their Catholicity, that consist not only in receiving the different races, but above all in realizing communion among them. Ethnic and cultural pluralism in the Church does not establish a situation that is to be tolerated as it is transitory, but is a structural dimension of the Church. The unity of the Church does not come from a common origin or language, but from the Spirit of Pentecost. He gathers together persons of different languages and nations into one sole people and confers on all of them faith in the same Lord and the call to the same hope. This unity is more profound than any other which is built on various other foundations. [1126]

d. Struggle for the respect of the dignity of man. [1127]

The missionary vocation of the Church find scope within the contemporary society where peoples of different tongues and creeds live side by side with Christian communities. Through migration, society has become a crucible races, religions and cultures, from which a new and more human world founded on truth and justice, is being awaited. The struggle of the Catholic lay person against injustice and for human promotion should be more vigorous than that of others. This is because by revelation and grace, God has entrusted to him the gifts of greater light and strength.

4. Mission of migrants [1128]

But in this Message, which center on the role of the laity in migration, I am addressing you migrants, in a special way.

The Church knows the complexity of your problems, the precariousness of your condition and the uncertainty of your future prospects. She takes every favourable occasion to appeal to the moral and civic conscience of the competent authorities so that they may implement the necessary provisions to improve your situations. I would therefore like to stress the great contribution that you, as migrants, are called to give to the mission of the Church, above all in the field of fraternity, unity and peace. It is a task that is entrusted to everyone independent of the position each one may hold in society. [1129]

a. You are called to express the solicitude of the Church within the sphere of the migrant community. [1130]

In a context on geographic and environmental diaspora, in which migrants find

themselves today, your contribution is irreplaceable. I am thinking in a particular way of the dispersion of migrants in the great metropolises of the occidental world. Here, a well-planned network of initiatives, of which you migrants should constitute the central axis, must express the authentic missionary solicitude of the Church in the field of migration. This is because where the Word of God is announced, there the Church is built, according to the words of the Lord: “Where two or three with them” (Mt. 18:20).

In the diaspora, the faith cannot simply be a heritage to protect, but a reality to go into more profoundly, verify and develop in the context of the particular Church. The process of interiorization and personalization of the faith requires the formation of real communities which, such as, are automatically grafted onto the local Church. The specific pastoral care of migrants, in order not to be an apostolate to the marginalized, must tend towards the formation of communities which fully belong to the construction of the Kingdom of God. [1131]

b. Migrants should be responsible for the growth of the migrant community. [1132]

To build the community in the context of migration it is important to undertake such initiatives as the formation of migrant groups with a strong spiritual character and awareness of the Christian commitment; the creation of small communities of faith that keep in touch with one another and share experiences; the institution of parochial councils composed of persons who live the Christian message and enjoy the trust of the community. The first immediate apostles of migrants themselves.

c. Migrants should live and transmit the faith within the family [1133]

Your task as laity within the community should continue within the family, a sector which, among all others, I would like to stress as a place of your particular commitment in migration. Exactly in a situation of diaspora and of growing irreligion, the family must be given back the role of being the primary place of catechesis and of being the domestic Church. Here parents are educators of their children learn the faith from concrete life experience.

Unfortunately, many among migrants are uprooted from their own family nuclei. They are person who love, suffer and search in a difficult situation. The Lord cannot be far from these people. It is therefore the duty of all lay people to become their “neighbours” and to announce the Good News in the style of the Lord: in church, at home, in the streets, among friends. [1134]

5. Duties of the priests in the formation of adults [1135]

However, still referring to the role of the laity, I am addressing the pastors who work in the field of migration. I wish to state once more that committed lay groups do not come into being without the work of a priest. Hence, here, they bear specific responsibility. I wish to add that from a functional point of view, it is always best to establish priorities. Here, I wish to underline the importance of relying primarily on lay adults. This does not mean neglecting the younger ones, it only means reaching them through other ways. Adults are chosen first of all because of giving

catechetical instruction is not merely teaching, but, through a change of mentality, living together all the implications of faith with existential realities. As they show how to live concretely the relationship between faith and life, which is so essential for the Christian, adults also become a “domestic Church” that teaches, gives witness, generates not only physical life but also faith.

6. Conclusion

[1136]

Migration today is a way for people to meet each other. It can destroy prejudices and make understanding and brotherhood ripen in view of the unity of the human family. In this perspective, migration so to be considered the spearhead of peoples marching towards universal brotherhood. In her structure which is communion, the Church welcomes all cultures without identifying herself with any one of them. As such, she becomes an efficacious sign of the tension towards unity that exist in the world. She who is the People of God on its way to perfection “is a most sure seed of unity, hope and salvation for the whole human race” (*Lumen Gentium*, 9).

The Marian Year, during which the Synod is to be held, gives the latter a particular touch. Because she believed in the promises of the Lord, the Blessed Virgin has become the most perfect image of the Church who generates new children to the faith. “That Christ may live in your hearts through faith...” (Eph 3:17). “Those who from generation to generation among the different peoples and nations of the earth accept with faith the mystery of Christ... seek in her (Mary’s) faith support for their own.” (*Enc. Redemptoris Mater*, 27). Through her intimate participation in the mystery of salvation, “she summons the faithful to her Son and his sacrifice, and to love for the Father. For this reason, Mary’s faith... in some way continues to become the faith of the pilgrim People of God; the faith of individuals and communities, of places gatherings, and of the various groups existing in the Church” (ibid. 28).

With the wish that this Message of mine evokes a generous response, I heartily impart my Apostolic Blessing to all, particularly to the poor, the sick and the children, in their difficult condition as migrants.

From the Vatican, the 5th of August of the year 1987, ninth of the Pontificate.

Joannes Paulus PP. II

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