

2001

Message

Migration and Inter-Religious Dialogue

For the 88th World Day of Migration 2002

John Paul II

25 July 2001

1. In the course of these last decades, humanity has more and more taken on the features of a large village, where distances have become shorter and the network of communications more compact. The development of modern means of transportation makes it easier for people to move from one country to another, from one continent to another. Among the consequences of this significant social phenomenon is the presence of about a hundred and fifty million immigrants spread all over the different parts of the world. This fact obliges society and the Christian community to reflect in order to be able to adequately respond to these emerging challenges, at the beginning of the new millennium, in a world where men and women of different cultures and religions are called to live shoulder to shoulder with one another. [1489]

For this living together to develop peacefully, it is indispensable to remove the barriers of diffidence, prejudice and fear that unfortunately still exist among those who belong to the different religions. In every country, dialogue and mutual tolerance are required among those who profess the religion of the majority and those who belong to minorities, often made up of immigrants, who are followers of various religions. Dialogue is the leading way to follow, and the Church invites us to walk this path in order to move from diffidence to respect, from rejection to welcome. [1490]

Recently, at the end of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, I wanted to renew an appeal in that direction, so that “a relationship of openness and dialogue with the followers of other religions” would come about (*Novo millennio ineunte*, 55). To reach this goal, initiatives that attract the attention of the major means of social communications are not enough. What are needed are rather everyday gestures, done with simplicity and constancy, that are capable of producing an authentic change in interpersonal relationships. [1491]

2. The vast and intense intertwining of migratory phenomena, which characterizes our times, multiplies the opportunities for interreligious dialogue. Countries with ancient Christian roots as well as multicultural societies offer concrete opportunities for inter-religious exchange. In the European continent, marked by a long Christian tradition, citizens arrive who profess other beliefs. North America, a land that is already living a solid multicultural experience, hosts followers of the new religious movements. In India, where Hinduism prevails, there are Catholic religious men and women who render humble and useful service to the poorest in the country. [1492]

Dialogue is not always easy. For Christians, however, the patient and confident [1493]

pursuit of it is a commitment to be constantly carried out. Counting on the grace of the Lord who enlightens minds and hearts, they remain open and welcoming towards those who profess other religions. Without ceasing to practice their own faith with conviction, they also pursue dialogue with those who are not Christians. They always well aware that to be able to authentically dialogue with others, a clear witness of their own faith is indispensable.

This sincere effort to dialogue presupposes, on one hand, the reciprocal acceptance [1494] of differences, and sometimes even of contradictions, and also a respect for the free decisions that people make according to their own conscience. It is therefore indispensable for each one, to whatever religion he may belong, to take into account the essential requirements of freedom of religion and of conscience, as stated so well by the Ecumenical Council Vatican II (cfr. *Dignitatis humanae*, 2) .

I would like to express the wish that this kind of living together in solidarity may [1495] also take place in countries where the majority profess a religion different from Christianity, but where Christian immigrants live and where they unfortunately do not always enjoy a true freedom of religion and conscience.

If, in the world of human mobility, everyone would be animated by this spirit, [1496] almost as in a forge, there will arise providential possibilities of a fruitful dialogue wherein the centrality of the person will never be denied. This is the only way to nourish the hope “for warding off the dread spectre of those wars of religion which have so often bloodied human history” and which have often forced many people to abandon their own countries. It is urgent to work so that the name of the one and only God may become what it is, ever more “a name of peace and a summons to peace” (cfr. *Novo millennio ineunte*, 55).

3. “*Migration and inter-religious dialogue*”: this is the theme proposed for the [1497] World Day of Migrants and Refugees of 2002. I pray the Lord that this annual celebration may offer all Christians the opportunity to go deeper into these all so actual aspects of the new evangelization. May they value every instrument at their disposal, so that in parish communities, appropriate apostolic and pastoral initiatives could be set up.

The parish represents the space in which a true pedagogy of meeting with people of [1498] various religious convictions and cultures can be realized. In its various expressions, the parish community can become a training ground of hospitality, a place where an exchange of experiences and gifts takes place. This cannot but foster a tranquil life together, preventing the risk of tension with immigrants who bring other religious beliefs with themselves.

If there is a common will to dialogue in spite of being different, it is possible to find [1499] a ground of profitable exchange and develop a beneficial and mutual friendship that can also be translated into an effective collaboration towards common objectives in the service of common good. This is a providential opportunity, especially for metropolitan areas where there are very large numbers of immigrants belonging to different cultures and religions. In this regard, it would be possible to speak of true “laboratories” of respectful living together and constructive dialogue. Allowing himself to be guided by his love for his Divine Teacher, who redeemed all men through his death on the cross, the Christian also opens his arms and heart to

everyone. It is the culture of respect and solidarity that must penetrate his spirit, especially when he is in multicultural and multi-religious environments.

4. Everyday, in many parts of the world, migrants, refugees and displaced people turn to Catholic organizations and parishes in search of support, and they are welcomed irrespective of cultural or religious affiliation. The service of charity, which Christians are always called to carry out, cannot be limited to the mere distribution of humanitarian aid. In this way, new pastoral situations arise, which the Church community cannot fail to take into consideration. It is the task of its members to look for appropriate occasions to share with those who are welcomed the gift of the revelation of God who is Love, who “so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son” (Jn 3:16). With the gift of material bread, it is indispensable not to neglect to offer the gift of faith, especially through one’s own existential witness and always with great respect for all. Welcome and mutual openness allow people to know each other better and to discover that the various religious traditions not rarely contain precious seeds of truth. The dialogue that results from this can enrich every spirit that is open to the Truth and the Good. [1500]

In this way, if inter-religious dialogue is one of the most significant challenges of our times, the phenomenon of migration could foster its development. Obviously, such dialogue, as I wrote in my apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, cannot “be based on religious indifferentism (no. 56). As a matter of fact, we Christians “are in duty bound, while engaging in dialogue, to bear clear witness to the hope that is within us” (ibid.). Dialogue must not hide, but exalt, the gift of faith. On the other hand, how can we keep such richness only for ourselves? How can we fail to offer the greatest treasure that we possess to migrants and foreigners who profess various religions and whom Providence places along our path, and do it with a great attention for the others’ sensitivity? [1501]

To accomplish this mission it is necessary to let the Holy Spirit guide us. On the day of Pentecost, it was the Spirit of Truth who completed the divine design of the unity of mankind in the diversity of cultures and religions. On hearing the Apostles, the numerous pilgrims gathered together in Jerusalem exclaimed with wonder: “Each of us hears them speaking in his own tongue about the marvels God has accomplished” (Acts 2:11). Since that day, the Church continues to carry out her mission, proclaiming the “marvels” that God does not cease to accomplish among those who belong to different races, peoples and nations. [1502]

5. To Mary, Mother of Jesus and of all humanity, I entrust the joys and the efforts of all those who sincerely pursue the way of dialogue among different religions and cultures, so that she may gather the people involved in the vast phenomenon of migration under her loving mantle. May Mary, the “Silence” in which the “Word” became flesh, the humble “handmaid of the Lord” who knew the tribulations of migration and the trials of solitude and abandonment, teach us to give witness to the Word who became Life among us and for us. May She render us ready for a frank and fraternal dialogue with all our migrant brothers and sisters, even if they belong to different religions. I accompany these wishes with the assurance of my prayerful remembrance, and I bless you all with affection. [1503]

From Castelgandolfo, 25 July 2001

Joannes Paulus II

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