

**MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
FOR THE WORLD DAY OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES 2005**

Intercultural Integration

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. The World Day of Migrants and Refugees is at hand. In the annual Message I usually address to you on this occasion, I would like this time to consider the phenomenon of migration from the perspective of integration.

Many people use this word to denote the need for immigrants to be truly incorporated in the host country, but neither the content of this concept nor its practice is easy to define. In this regard I would like to sketch the picture by recalling the recent Instruction *Erga migrantes caritas Christi* (The love of Christ towards migrants) (cf. nos. 2, 42, 43, 62, 80, 89).

In this Document, integration is not presented as an assimilation that leads migrants to suppress or to forget their own cultural identity. Rather, contact with others leads to discovering their "secret", to being open to them in order to welcome their valid aspects and thus contribute to knowing each one better. This is a lengthy process that aims to shape societies and cultures, making them more and more a reflection of the multi-faceted gifts of God to human beings. In this process the migrant is intent on taking the necessary steps towards social inclusion, such as learning the national language and complying with the laws and requirements at work, so as to avoid the occurrence of exasperated differentiation.

I will not deal with the various aspects of integration. All I desire on this occasion is to go deeper with you into some implications of its intercultural dimension.

2. No one is unaware of the identity conflict that often comes about in the meeting of persons of different cultures. Positive elements do exist in this. By introducing themselves into a new environment, immigrants often become more aware of who they are, especially when they miss the persons and values that are important to them.

In our society, characterized by the global phenomenon of migration, individuals must seek the proper balance between respect for their own identity and recognition of that of others. Indeed, it is necessary to recognize the legitimate plurality of cultures present in a country, in harmony with the preservation of law and order, on which depend social peace and the freedom of citizens.

Indeed, it is essential to exclude on the one hand assimilationist models that tend to transform those who are different into their own copy, and on the other, models of marginalization of immigrants, with attitudes that can even arrive at the choice of *apartheid*. The way to take is the path of genuine integration (cf. *Ecclesia in Europa*, no. 102) with an open outlook that refuses to consider solely the differences between immigrants and the local people (cf. *Message for World Day for Peace 2001*, no. 12).

3. Thus the need arose for a dialogue between people of different cultures in a context of pluralism that goes beyond mere tolerance and reaches sympathy. A simple juxtaposition of

groups of migrants and locals tends to encourage a reciprocal closure between cultures, or the establishment, among them, of relations that are merely superficial or tolerant. We should encourage instead a mutual fecundation of cultures. This implies reciprocal knowledge and openness between cultures, in a context of true understanding and benevolence.

Christians, conscious on their part of the transcendent action of the Spirit, can also recognize in the various cultures the presence of "precious elements of religion and humanity" (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 92) that can offer solid prospects of mutual understanding. It will, of course, be necessary to combine the principle of respect for cultural differences with the protection of values that are in common and inalienable, because they are founded on universal human rights. This gives rise to that atmosphere of "civic reasonableness" that permits friendly and serene coexistence.

Moreover, if they are coherent with themselves, Christians cannot give up proclaiming the Gospel of Christ to all creation (cf. *Mk* 16:15). Obviously, they must do so with respect for the conscience of others, always resorting to the method of charity, as St Paul had already recommended to the early Christians (cf. *Eph* 4:15).

4. The image from the Prophet Isaiah, to which I have several times referred at the meetings with the youth of the whole world (cf. *Is* 21:11-12), could also be used here to invite all believers to be "morning watchmen". As such, Christians must above all listen to the cry for help that comes from a multitude of migrants and refugees, but they must then foster, with active commitment, prospects of hope that will herald the dawn of a more open and supportive society. It is up to them in the first place to make out God's presence in history, even when everything still seems to be enveloped in darkness.

With this hope, which I transform into prayer to God who wants to gather every nation and every language around him (cf. *Is* 66:18), I send to each one of you my Blessing with deep affection.

From the Vatican, 24 November 2004

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