



Ninth Bishop Joe Grech Memorial Colloquium on Ethics and Migration
Brisbane, 5 August 2019

IT IS NOT JUST ABOUT MIGRANTS

Fr. Fabio Baggio C.S.
Migrants & Refugees Section - DPIHD

Your Excellencies, Reverend Fathers, Brothers and Sisters, Dear Friends,

I thank the organizers for inviting me to speak at this Ninth Bishop Joe Grech Memorial Colloquium on Ethics and Migration, thus allowing me to convey the greetings and appreciation of His Holiness Pope Francis and of the Migrants & Refugees Section of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development for this initiative.

The core message and overall theme of the Holy Father for the celebration of the 105th World Day of Migrants and Refugees carries the title “It is not just about migrants.”

With this choice, Pope Francis intends to emphasize that his repeated appeals in favour of migrants, refugees, displaced persons and victims of trafficking must be understood within his deep concern for all inhabitants of the existential peripheries. The hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and the prisoner who knocks today at our door is Jesus himself who asks to be met and assisted.

As the Holy Father himself emphasized in his homily on Friday 15 February 2019 in Sacrofano, Italy: “It is truly [Jesus], even though our eyes find it hard to recognize Him: with His clothing in rags, His feet dirty, His face disfigured, His body wounded, unable to speak our language” (Francis, *Homily*, 15 February 2019).

To further clarify the title of his Message, the Holy Father has developed it into seven sub-themes.

It is not just about migrants: it is also about our fears. The fears we feel in the face of today's migratory challenges are real. The signs of meanness we see around us

heighten our fear of 'the other', the unknown, the marginalized, the foreigner. "Often, we refuse to encounter the other and we raise barriers to defend ourselves. Refusing to encounter others is not human. Rather, we are called to overcome our fear and open ourselves up to encounter." (Francis, *Homily*, 15 February 2019). "Take courage, it is I, do not be afraid!" (Mt 14:27). We cannot let fears deprive us of the desire and ability to meet the other, and in others to meet Jesus Christ.

It is not just about migrants: it's also about charity. Today our migrant brothers and sisters offer us the opportunity to live the highest level of charity, that which is practised towards those who are unable to reciprocate and perhaps even to thank us. "For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same?" (Mt 5:46). "Charity cannot be neutral, antiseptic, indifferent, lukewarm or impartial! Charity is infectious, it excites, it risks and it engages! For true charity is always unmerited, unconditional and gratuitous!" (Francis, *Homily*, 15 February 2015).

It is not just about migrants: it's also about our humanity. "Humanity, by virtue of which you take care of the sufferings of many people, is the same that drives the Good Samaritan to tend to the wounded man lying on the ground. He feels compassion and makes himself his neighbour." (Francis, *Address to members of the Italian Red Cross*, 27 January 2018). The encounter with the other and with our neighbour's needs offers us the opportunity to restore the humanity of others, to grow in our own humanity and to contribute to building up a true human family.

It is not just about migrants: it's also about not excluding anyone. "See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven always look upon the face of my heavenly Father." (Mt 18:10). The little ones, the poor, the most vulnerable are those who pay the price of wars, injustice and exclusive development. We are called, instead, to include everyone in our journey of global growth, so that everyone has access to integral human development.

It is not just about migrants: it is about putting the last in the first place. One obstacle is spontaneous 'group interest', whatever the group might be: "Us first, me first, and then any others!" Instead, the true motto of the Christian is "The last shall be first!" (Mt 20:16). This is the logic of the Gospel, and we must put ourselves at their service. There are many unsung heroes who put vulnerable migrants and refugees in the first place, before their own comfort and even safety, by helping in high seas rescues, in offering food and shelter, and simply by listening, healing, praying with them.

It is not just about migrants: it is about the whole person, about all people. Another obstacle is the fragmentation of modern, fast-paced life. Even our seniors in some kind of retirement can feel this way, let alone students preparing for adulthood and adults who are more or less participating in the economy and society. There is great pressure to ignore relationships and deeper meanings in favour of quick

consumerism and the flash of an electronic screen. But thanks be to God, vulnerable migrants come along and remind us existentially that Their immediate need and rights are a compelling reminder of the real facts of life, namely, that we cannot be reduced to mere consumers, but need to encounter the whole person. Moreover, full and true life cannot be assured for a few while forgetting - or much worse, depriving - many others. Either we all develop integrally, or there's no integral development for anyone.

It is not just about migrants: it is about building the city of God and man. The final consideration brings to mind the inspiring vision of the new Jerusalem with which our Holy Scriptures end in the Book of Revelation. "Now God's home is with humankind ... Now I make all things new" (Rv 21:3,5). This vision, as the sub-theme states, is. Building "our common home" (*Laudato si'*) among all people is not easy, particularly because it must not benefit only a few while many are exploited. The vision needs instead to be based on true faith and solid values. "Who welcomes the stranger welcomes me," Jesus says, "and who welcomes me welcomes the Father who sent me." (cf Mt 25:35, Mt 10:40) Christian parishes and religious communities who have taken in refugee families, as Pope Francis challenged them to do, often testify with great gratitude for a deeply human and deeply divine experience of Christ living in their midst.

With the occasion of the 105th *World Day of Migrants and Refugees*, the Migrants & Refugees Section is inviting all local Churches to celebrate on Sunday 29 September 2019 a special Eucharist inviting migrants, refugees, survivors of human trafficking, and internally displaced persons, along with the organizations which serve them. This is what the Holy Father will do in St Peter's Square.

In order to make this year's World Day of Migrants and Refugees as beautiful and meaningful as possible, the Migrants & Refugees Section has mounted a communication campaign offering monthly reflections, information and multimedia materials, from a variety of viewpoints. All the material, which is available in the official website of the Migrants & Refugees Section (www.migrants-refugees.va), is aimed at promoting a deeper understanding of the theme and sub-themes chosen by Pope Francis.

I would like to conclude my speech by quoting Pope Francis: "Through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Our Lady of the Way," we shall join together in praying for "God's abundant blessings on all the world's migrants and refugees and on all those who accompany them on their journey" (Francis, *Message for the 105th World Day of Migrants and Refugees*, 29 September 2019).