

**Homily for the 2018 World Day of Peace  
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For this 51<sup>st</sup> World Day of Peace, Pope Francis has given us the theme, “Migrants and refugees: men and women in search of peace.” The theme carries forward a two-year campaign that the Holy Father launched this past September, called “Share the Journey.” As millions of people flee war, persecution and poverty, the campaign invites us to walk with migrants through greater prayer and support.

While migration might be a difficult subject of conversation, especially in today’s polarized culture, for us as Church, it is not a political or ideological concern. Migration is, as all our concerns should be, a human one. First and foremost, migration is about the 250 million children of God moving across the globe. Many of them are moving by choice, but a vast number are moving out of dire necessity, including 22.5 million refugees. And so, let us go beyond the fiery rhetoric, the fear and the uncertainty surrounding migration and turn our “contemplative gaze” to the human element behind this issue (no.3).

First off, the Church teaches that every one of us has the right to find opportunity in our homelands. Consequently, the first approach to the issue of migration is for us to build a world in which no one is forced to migrate. Until that day arrives, however, there will be migrants among us. Let us appreciate, then, who they are and how we are to receive them.

Since the dawn of humanity, people have migrated. Our ancestors did so in order to fulfill the holy responsibility of protecting the God-given life and dignity of themselves and of the families whom God entrusted into their care. Today is no different. Among the millions of people traversing the Earth right now, we know, for instance, there are families fleeing drugs, gangs and poverty in Central America, civil war in the Middle East and Africa, disaster and climate change in island nations, and ethnic cleansing in Myanmar. When faced with such sinful situations, the Church recognizes that people have both a right and a responsibility to migrate. To understand why, we only need to ask ourselves, “What would I do, if I were in their shoes? Would I resign myself and my family to defeat? Or would I flee seeking survival and a better life?”

We at least know how Mary and Joseph faced this question. The Gospel passage from Luke that we just heard presents Mary and Joseph celebrating the birth of their son, as they receive the visiting shepherds who come to share their joy. While Mary quietly holds on to their enthusiasm and says little, she anticipates more than anyone the trials her son will eventually face. For once we turn to Gospel of Matthew, we discover that this gentle moment for the Holy Family is tossed into turmoil. King Herod will soon search for the child that he believes is a challenge to his power. He will order the slaughter of every infant, two years-old and younger, throughout Bethlehem. Mary and Joseph will have to race from their homeland, frantically clutching the baby Jesus in their arms, to live as refugees in Egypt. We can even imagine them praying that God would see them through their journey alive and that the Egyptian strangers, upon whose kindness they would soon rely, [that these strangers] would help them survive in their new land.

Jesus Christ was born to a refugee family, in the midst of a Jewish people who were oppressed by brutal Roman occupation. God chose to take on human flesh as a migrant amidst such unrest.

Jesus' story tells us that, should we wish to welcome him into our lives, then we must also receive the strangers he sends to us. Sharing in the journeys of the most poor and vulnerable among us today can be our opportunity to welcome and assist the Holy Family, as though we had been there waiting for them upon their arrival in Egypt.

In his homily for the Christmas Mass, Pope Francis makes this connection for us. He states:

*So many other footsteps are hidden in the footsteps of Joseph and Mary. We see the tracks of entire families forced to set out in our own day. Surviving the Herods of today... Mary and Joseph, for whom there was no room, are the first to embrace the One who comes to give all of us our document of citizenship... So that in him we will not be afraid to take into our arms, raise up and embrace the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, the imprisoned (cf. Mt 25:35-36)... In this child, God makes us agents of his hospitality.*

So how can we be agents of God's hospitality to our migrant brothers and sisters? To name few:

- **We can all get to know better the migrants and refugees among us. For those who might not have found too many opportunities for this yet, consider attending a Mass at one of our parishes that hosts a migrant or refugee community.**
- **We can also learn more about the migration experience through such educational programs as the Border Crossing and Breathe Free events advertised in your program inserts.**
- **We can address the basic needs of food, shelter and clothing for migrants through such agencies as Catholic Charities' Su Casa and Refugee Resettlement Programs.**

**On a public policy level, God's hospitality challenges us to consider how we can welcome as many newcomers as possible while still protecting the common good of all of us already here. For any nation, there are no simple answers for how to achieve the perfect balance. It is indeed appropriate, then, for us to debate this issue in a civil manner.**

**Based on our lived experience with migrants, Church leadership in this country is convinced that we can have a much fairer immigration system: one that enhances national security while providing more paths to legal entry. I express my gratitude to the parishioners in our Archdiocese who joined in sending over 15,000 letters to Congress urging the passage of the DREAM Act for young migrants. These youth were brought as children into this country, carried in the arms of their parents. But now they have no means to legalize their status. Hospitality requires us to advocate for them. And, while**

supporting strong vetting procedures, Church leadership is also encouraging the Administration to not reduce the number of refugees whom we can rescue through resettlement.

Lastly, let us also recognize that the Holy Family's journey into exile and then back to the Promised Land illustrates our own Christian journey. And, today's migrants can serve to do the very same. We are all pilgrims on a journey from this earthly realm to the Kingdom of God, a kingdom far greater than any nation to which we have ever belonged. Continually reminding ourselves of this keeps our eyes on the true destination of our lives and stops us from getting too deeply caught up in the temporary identities of this world. I have been blessed myself to have encountered a number of migrants and refugees in our Archdiocese. In my years working at the Bishops' Conference in Washington, D.C., I visited refugee camps in Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines, and elsewhere. And, if there is something I would say that stands out in nearly every migrant and refugee, it is their radical sense of hope.

It is a hope visible in their eyes, a hope that drove them out of adversity, a hope that sustained them across the deserts and oceans of their journeys, a hope that drives them forward to a future full of promise. Our own spiritual journeys should be motivated by a similar intensity of hope. A hope that puts our worldly desires and difficulties into perspective and propels us toward the greater life God has promised. Migrants can teach us this. Let us allow their stories to reignite our Christian hope for the good news awaiting us in the Kingdom yet to come!

**To those of you here who have migrated from other lands, please know that the Church walks with you and receives you as a gift. To all of you who find ways to accompany others on their journeys and to all of those who provide opportunities for people in their homelands, you have my deepest gratitude for your compassion. And, for all of us here, may God look past all our sins and impart the grace that bestows citizenship in the true Kingdom which we all yearn to enter.**

**On this New Year's Day, I wish you, your family, friends, and loved ones many blessed journeys.**