

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time - B
World Day of Migrants and Refugees

Our Lady of Sorrows Church

18 January

2015

Dear brothers in the priesthood, dear Sisters and dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Introduction

Today, together with the Church throughout the world, the Archdiocese of Vancouver, is celebrating the Annual Day of Migrants and Refugees. In our thoughts and prayers we remember those many people who have faced, or are facing, the experience of migration in all its various forms: whether permanent or seasonal, economic or political, voluntary or forced.¹ As well as the many immigrants in our own Archdiocese, we cannot forget today the millions of refugees around the world, especially those in the Middle East and Africa, who have had to leave their homes because of violence, terror and religious persecution. Sadly, there is widespread indifference in the face of these tragedies, which is a dramatic sign of the loss of that sense of responsibility and solidarity for our brothers and sisters, on which every society is based. As believers, it is always necessary to see the human face of migration.

¹ Cf. Benedict XVI, Message for the 2011 World Day of Migrants and Refugees.

Gratitude to Those Who Welcome Refugees and Migrants

I am especially grateful to the Scalabrini Fathers and the associates of the Scalabrinians for their zeal and for their faithfulness to their charism of accompanying, supporting, and defending migrant peoples in our Archdiocese. They do so in the parishes entrusted to them – here at Our Lady of Sorrows, at Our Lady of Fatima and at St. Helen’s – and in the migrant ministry to Hispanic seasonal workers carried out under their inspiration and the direction of Father Richard.

But my gratitude also extends to all the other priests and the Sisters, as well as the many selfless volunteers, who have made ministry to migrant peoples in our Archdiocese a priority in their apostolic endeavours. Particular thanks are likewise due to Evelyn Vollet, Director of the Archdiocesan Office of Service and Justice and all those who work with her in this ministry. You are, all of you, tireless in ensuring that we strive to put into practice in our daily life the Lord’s own words: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me” (Mt 25:35).

I encourage you to carry on generously with your ministry, and not to become discouraged, but to continue to commit yourselves to working with refugees and migrants who find themselves in conditions of need and marginalization, on the peripheries of our society. May they find in you brothers and sisters who love them with the same love that Christ had,

who himself experienced being a refugee in Egypt, for the most marginalized! Continue to bend down and lend a helping hand to all those who are in need, without counting the cost and without fear, but rather with tenderness and with understanding.

Always remember that for them you are the welcoming and joyous face of the Church. Thank you for “not being that kind of Christian who keeps the Lord’s wounds at arm’s length.”²

Gifts of Migrants to Our Local Church

We live in a province and country which, from their origins, have welcomed migrants and refugees from nearly every country on earth. All of us here come from families of immigrants to Canada, whether we have been here for generations or recently arrived.

And so, we give thanks to the Lord that our local Church is now home to so many people from different nations, ethnic backgrounds and cultures. Dear friends: your presence enables us to appreciate what it means when we say in the Creed that we believe in “the holy Catholic Church.” She is, quite literally, “without frontiers.” A concrete sign of our catholicity, of our being a worldwide Church which welcomes “every nation, race, people, and tongue” (Rev 7:9), is that fact that Holy Mass is regularly celebrated in more than 20 languages in our

² Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 270.

Archdiocese.

I think here of the many blessings that migrants and refugees bring to our local Church: your deep faith in God, often tried by persecution or situations of hardship in your homelands; your religious fervour expressed in the different popular devotions that enrich our religious life with your traditions; and your willing generosity to help others who are still in the process of migrating. “Dear friends, you are close to the Church’s heart, because the Church is a people on a journey towards the Kingdom of God which Jesus Christ has brought into our midst.”³

Temporary Workers

Besides those who come to Canada as their new homeland, there are others who come here as temporary workers. Because of this, many of them are particularly vulnerable to injustice as well as to obstacles in practising their faith. A significant number of these temporary workers are farm labourers from Latin America, as well as many women, largely from the Philippines, who do domestic work, help children and the elderly, care for the sick and serve in the hospitality sector.

³ Francis, Remarks after the Angelus (19 January 2014).

For all such temporary migrants we must strive and, when necessary, lobby those in power, to ensure their fair treatment and the recognition of all their inalienable human rights.⁴ It is our responsibility as Catholic Christians – and today let us rekindle our initiatives – to assist all those who encounter mistrust, prejudice, hostility, and injustice while they are here with us.

To cite Pope Francis in this year’s Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees: “Dear migrants and refugees! You have a special place in the heart of the Church, and you help her to enlarge her heart and to manifest her motherhood towards the entire human family. Do not lose your faith and hope!”

Gospel

Now a word about today’s Gospel. It narrates the call of the first disciples as recorded by John the Evangelist. It reminds us that people are drawn to Jesus because others point him out.

Take John the Baptist. He had his own followers who held him in high esteem as a great prophet. But John knew that he was only a messenger preparing the way for One greater than he was. And so, one day, “as he watched Jesus walk by,” he shouted out to his followers: “Look, – and not at me! – here is the Lamb of God” (Jn 1:36).

⁴ Cf. Benedict XVI, Message for the 2006 World Day of Migrants and Refugees.

He seemed to know that Jesus, the Lamb of God, “came into the world with a precise mission: to liberate it from the slavery of sin by taking on himself the sins of mankind. How? By loving. There is no other way to conquer evil and sin than by the love that leads to giving up one’s life for others.”⁵

Like each one of us, John the Baptist had a role to play in the divine plan – and that was to lead others not to himself but to Jesus, our Lord and Saviour. He was to point out the Messiah to others, to us. His followers left him for Jesus – and he was glad!

And look, too, at what happened when the first disciples followed Jesus. They became excited by the Lord’s presence, and one of them, Andrew, then went to call his brother, Simon, to join the group of followers. What does this tell us? That Jesus had need of others in his ministry.

Here the Gospel shows that both John the Baptist and Andrew brought others to Jesus, so that they could “abide” or stay with him, learn from him, and then later be sent out to preach on his behalf.

Is this not what we are called to do with others, and especially with newcomers in our midst? We are to go out to them and bring them to Jesus. “Each one of us . . . is called to witness to the Gospel, with greater

⁵ Francis, *Angelus* (19 January 2014).

concern for those brothers and sisters who, from other countries and for various reasons, have come to live among us.”⁶

⁶ Benedict XVI, Angelus (18 January 2009).

The Church needs you, dear friends, and is counting on you to bring others to Jesus. You play a very important role in the Church's mission of evangelization. You must, of course, present this Good News in a way that takes into account the different social and cultural situations you encounter as well as the unique difficulties of each refugee, immigrant or temporary worker among us.

Your challenge is to help those recently arrived among us, whether for the long term or only temporarily, to keep their faith alive and vibrant when they are deprived of the support that existed in their country of origin. It seems to me we must devise new and more effective pastoral approaches, so that the new arrivals to our Archdiocese will maintain and deepen the faith they had when they arrived.⁷

But if our main concern is with those who share the Catholic faith, we cannot fail to see that the migration of so many people to the Lower Mainland also provides a providential opportunity for the proclamation of the Gospel to those who do not yet know the love of Jesus. To the many men and women, above all from Asia, who have not yet encountered Jesus Christ or know him only by name, we must give witness to the Lord who is for everyone the source of "life in abundance."

⁷ Cf. Benedict XVI, Message for the 2012 World Day of Migrants and Refugees.

It is necessary that we ask the good Lord to have the courage to be bold and fearless evangelizers, because others expect from us and need the Good News which is Jesus and his Gospel.⁸

Conclusion

Let us pray, as we continue this Mass, that the Blessed Virgin Mary will help us to serve her Son by welcoming every stranger in our midst! Amen.

— J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver

⁸ Cf. Francis, Address to Participants at the International Pastoral Congress of the World's Big Cities (27 November 2014).