

**ADDRESS OF ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE,  
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“SHARE THE JOURNEY: THE POWER OF THE STORY TO CHANGE HEARTS”  
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*INTRODUCTION*

Good afternoon! I am happy to be with you as you address the theme of migration in the context of the beautiful story of the the disciples on the road to Emmaus. As the Apostolic Nuncio, the representative of the Holy Father to the United States, I want to express the spiritual closeness and paternal affection of the Holy Father and to convey Pope Francis' gratitude for your efforts at Catholic Charities, particularly those efforts directed toward the care of migrants, a group so dear to the heart of the Holy Father. I thank Sister Donna Markham, President and CEO of Catholic Charities, for her kind invitation.

In addressing migration, I wanted to begin with my story - the story of my own people and a brief review of my missions. I am a priest of the Archdiocese of Rennes, hailing from Saint-Malo. I am from the heart of Brittany. The Bretons are a Celtic ethnic group and trace much of their heritage to groups who migrated to northern France, especially from Devon and Cornwall. According to historians, their migration happened in waves, following the gradual decline of the Roman Empire and later the Anglo-Saxon invasion of Britain. The culture and language of the Bretons flourished, and the people themselves developed their spiritual traditions, including religious pilgrimages. Migration is part of the story of my people, just as it is part of the story of your people. Frankly, it is part of the story of every people I have encountered in my diplomatic missions.

My first mission as a Vatican diplomat was in New Zealand, which, at the time, seemed to be the most distant outpost. Between 1800-1930, during a time of rapid industrialization, more than 48 million people left Europe for the New World or for Australia and New Zealand. The immigration to New Zealand was continuing, even when I arrived there in 1977! New people were arriving with struggles, hopes, and dreams.

After four years, I was sent to Mozambique and Zimbabwe, and from there to Cuba. You know that many were forced to flee from Cuba due to the political situation and that many families were separated from one another and from their homeland – a situation which continues. From Cuba, I went to Brazil, a former Portuguese colony with an immense Catholic population; people came from all over the world, and the effects of migration were evident. While there was great poverty, there was also a festive spirit and an authentic cultural synthesis that the encounter between peoples produced.

I left Brazil to work in Geneva at the Permanent Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations. There I became immersed in the political dimensions of the problem of migration. In 1995, I was appointed as Apostolic Nuncio to Haiti, a nation that has suffered from poverty, corruption, governmental instability, and a series of national disasters. Haitians began arriving in this country in large numbers following the collapse of the Duvalier government, and the trend of migration here continued following the earthquake there in 2010. From Haiti, I was transferred to Uganda, where I served from 1999-2007. Uganda experienced the displacement of many people during the Ugandan civil war, which ended in 1986, and so the issue of migration was always before me.

In March 2007, I began a new mission as Apostolic Nuncio to Mexico, where I served for nine years prior to my appointment to the United States in 2016. I have been able to see the issue of migration from both sides of the border, and more important than the “issue”, I have come to know the people who have dreams for a better life and yet who suffer from a broken system. Many come to the United States from Mexico or through Mexico fleeing extreme poverty and violence, due to drug and human trafficking and to ethnic and religious persecution. In addressing the Diplomatic Corps in 2015, the Holy Father noted that migrants “at times are not searching for a better future, but simply a future, since to remain in their own country would mean certain death.” (Address of the Holy Father to the Diplomatic Corps, 12 January 2015)

I mention all this to make a simple point: throughout the whole world, migration is an issue that cannot be avoided. It must be addressed, not in a hostile, confrontational way, but in a prudent and just way that respects the dignity of each person and that allows for a mutual enrichment of peoples and cultures. This is the story of the people of the United States. People came to the new world, often fleeing poverty and religious persecution, in search of a better future, marked by the promise of freedom.

After the initial migration, in the middle of the nineteenth century, the Irish came to these shores, fleeing famine and religious persecution. They often faced discrimination for being both Irish and Catholic and were often disillusioned by the signs that read, “NINA” – No Irish Need Apply. It was the Church that supported many of these newcomers, and it was the Church once more who supported waves of Eastern European and Italian immigrants at the time of the industrial revolution. The United States also generously welcomed so many displaced persons after the Second World War, and again, after Vietnam, receiving refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia and elsewhere.

Rightly, this nation is called a “melting pot”, with the Statue of Liberty standing as a symbol of the promise of freedom. The words of Emma Lazarus, author of the sonnet, the New Colossus, ought to speak to all gathered here: “Give me your tired, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.”

Now once more, this country – and the Church with it – is confronted with new migrants, coming from the global South. What will our response be? Migration cannot be ignored as some sort of peripheral issue. Indeed, the Holy Father and the bishops in this country keep pointing our attention to this reality. Beginning with his trip to Lampedusa, Pope Francis has kept this issue in front of us. The Pope draws our attention to reality by frequently speaking about migrants. He does not want them to escape from our sight. He wants us to accept our responsibilities. I think the American bishops have recognized this responsibility in their pastoral responses, and you, at Catholic Charities, are looking for effective and constructive solutions to problems that are affecting the whole world.

#### *THE ROAD TO EMMAUS*

In looking at migration in the context of the Emmaus journey, I found it helpful to return to an address that Pope Francis gave to the Bishops of Brazil during his trip to Rio for World Youth Day five years ago. There, he proposed the icon of Emmaus as a key for interpreting the present and the future. In Brazil, this was necessary as Church membership was declining due to rapid secularization and the rise of sects. It would have been easy to be discouraged. The disciples on the road to Emmaus knew this discouragement, as the One they hoped would be the Messiah

had been put to death. They were scandalized by the cross and by the humiliation that Jesus had undergone.

Rather than allowing the bishops to give in to discouragement, the Holy Father posed the question: What is God asking of us? We could ask the same question with respect to the question of migration, for there are many people, including migrants, who feel just like the disciples on the road – lost, searching for answers, and disillusioned. While one interpretation of the Emmaus story is to illustrate how the disciples – the Church – welcomed Christ the stranger, another interpretation would have the Church, with Christ as its Head, bearing His Presence, drawing near to the lost and disillusioned, who cannot find their way or find meaning in life.

Pope Francis asks the Church: What is God asking of us? In other words, what type of Church should we be for migrants? He answers:

“We need a Church unafraid of going forth into their night. We need a Church capable of meeting them on their way. We need a Church capable of entering into their conversation. We need a Church able to dialogue with those disciples who, having left Jerusalem behind, are wandering aimlessly, alone, with their own disappointment, disillusioned by a Christianity now considered barren, fruitless soil, incapable of generating meaning.” (POPE FRANCIS, ADDRESS TO THE BISHOPS OF BRAZIL, 28 JULY 2013)

Pope Francis recognizes that there has been a relentless process of globalization and urbanization, which, positively has created opportunities for some and, through advances in communications, has made new information and services available. Nevertheless, he notes that, “many are living the negative effects of these realities without realizing how they affect a proper vision of man and the world. This generates enormous confusion and emptiness which people are unable to explain, regarding the purpose of life, personal disintegration, the loss of experience of belonging to a ‘home’ and the absence of personal space and strong personal ties.” (POPE FRANCIS, ADDRESS TO THE BISHOPS OF BRAZIL, 28 JULY 2013)

#### *WITNESSING TO THE DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON*

What should be the response of the Church? Pope Francis responds:

“The Church affirms the right to serve man in his wholeness, and to speak of what God has revealed about human beings and their fulfillment. The Church wants to make present that spiritual patrimony without which society falls apart and cities are overwhelmed by their own walls, pits, and barriers. The Church has a right and duty to keep alive the flame of human freedom and unity.” (IBID.)

When the Holy Father refers to speaking about “human beings and their fulfillment,” concretely he means proposing a clear vision of man and his destiny. The human person is endowed with reason and, as such, can know the good. He or she also is given freedom to choose the good. While there are many unjust social structures that can limit our freedom in certain situations, we are not slaves to instinct; rather, we have an ability to discern and to choose.

The human person, made in God’s image and likeness, possesses inherent dignity. One’s dignity is not based on attributes such as beauty, intelligence, wealth, or nationality, etc.; it is not based on what a person has or does, but on who the person *is*.

The Christian understands the person as a unity of body and soul, bearing the divine image, worthy of care and respect. He or she is not a “thing” to be used; the body is not something to be controlled or manipulated but is integral to one’s identity. Pope Francis laments the “throwaway culture”, but he is particularly concerned when people are treated as objects to be discarded like some commodity.

Pope Benedict XVI in *Caritas in veritate* warned that migrants were particularly at risk, writing that they are often “considered as a commodity or mere workforce. They must not, therefore, be treated like any other factor of production. Every migrant is a human person who, as such, possesses fundamental, inalienable rights that must be respected by everyone and in every circumstance.” (POPE BENEDICT XVI, ENCYCLICAL LETTER *CARITAS IN VERITATE*, 29 JUNE 2009, 62)

Human dignity is intimately connected with the person’s status as a *relational* being. Aristotle lists living in community as a natural inclination of man. As a spiritual being, the person is defined through his or her relationships, both with God and neighbor. The person bears the image of the Triune God, a community of persons within the one divine Substance. God incorporates us into another community of love, the Church. In God and in the Church, we do not lose our identity as persons; rather, there is a profound sharing of experiences, which enriches the whole body.

Catholic teaching regarding respect for human life and Catholic Social Doctrine rest upon the dignity of the human person. Because of this and because of what has been revealed to us, Catholics have a special obligation to defend and protect the most vulnerable, from the unborn to the migrant.

In his recent exhortation, *Gaudete et Exsultate* (cf. nn. 101-103) Pope Francis writes:

“We often hear it said that, with respect to relativism and the flaws of our present world, the situation of migrants, for example, is a lesser issue. Some Catholics consider it a secondary issue compared to the ‘grave’ bioethical questions. That a politician looking for votes might say such a thing is understandable, but not a Christian, for whom the only proper attitude, is to stand in the shoes of those brothers and sisters of ours who risk their lives to offer a future to their children. Can we not realize that this is exactly what Jesus demands of us, when he tells us that in welcoming the stranger we welcome him (cf. Mt 25:35)? ...” (POPE FRANCIS, APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *GAUDETE ET EXSULTATE*, 19 MARCH 2018, 102)

How have we treated our brothers and sisters? Jesus identifies himself with those in need – the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the prisoner, and states: “*Whatever you did to the least of my brothers and sisters, you did to me.*” (Mt 25:40) As Catholics, we have received the commandments to love both God and neighbor, and in Matthew’s description of the last judgment, we see that the two commandments become one.

Thus, the first response of the Church is to offer the world a coherent vision of the human person *and* to remind the public and those with authority that migrants are people too! It is also incumbent upon us to be *witnesses* to the God who is love by our own care of our brothers and sisters – even those who are strangers to us.

The Holy Father never ceases to speak about being in a permanent state of mission and of the need for pastoral conversion, but the *method* for carrying out the mission lies in our witness:

“Concerning mission, we need to remember that its urgency derives from its inner motivation; in other words, it is about handing on a legacy. As for method, it is essential to realize that legacy is about witness; it is like a baton in a relay race: you don’t throw it up in the air for whoever is able to catch it, so that anyone who doesn’t catch it has to manage without. In order to transmit a legacy, one needs to hand it over personally, to touch the one to whom we give, to relay this inheritance.” (POPE FRANCIS, ADDRESS TO THE BISHOPS OF BRAZIL, 28 JULY 2013)

We can ask: Are we as Catholics giving effective and personal witness to the dignity of the human person and to the God in whose image and likeness the person is made? We are afforded an opportunity to reflect on whether our work and ministry personally communicate, especially to the migrant, the love experienced from Jesus and the Church. What are we to do? Give witness – just as the disciples on the road to Emmaus witnessed to the Risen Lord!

*STANDING IN SOLIDARITY WITH MIGRANTS: CONFRONTING AN UNHEALTHY NATIONALISM*

Earlier, we asked: What should be the response of the Church to the crisis of migrants? In addition to affirming human dignity, the Church must exercise *solidarity*, which Pope Francis described as standing “in the shoes of those brothers and sisters of ours who risk their lives to offer a future to their children.”

The Christian message regarding the dignity of the person and the love of neighbor has a universal appeal which helps us realize the unity of the human family. Pope John XXIII wrote:

“The unity of the human family has always existed, because its members are human beings all equal by virtue of their natural dignity. Hence there will always exist the objective need to promote, in sufficient measure, the *universal* common good, which is the common good of the entire human family.” (JOHN XXIII, ENCYCLICAL LETTER *PACEM IN TERRIS*, APRIL 11, 1963)

The promotion of the common good demands solidarity. Solidarity, born from an encounter, can push humanity to search for true justice without forgetting the least of our brothers and sisters. Solidarity demands recognizing the inherent human dignity of each person and rejecting the throwaway culture. It thereby becomes a condition for peace. The idea of welcoming another, especially someone fleeing persecution or “certain death” is not the privilege of Christians but is the common work of humanity.

In his exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis writes:

Solidarity in its deepest and most challenging sense, thus becomes a way of making history in a life setting where conflicts, tensions, and oppositions can achieve a diversified and life-giving unity. (POPE FRANCIS, APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *EVANGELII GAUDIUM*, 24 NOVEMBER 2013, 228)

This unity demands effort. The centrality of the person and the natural inclination to form relationships leads people to establish nations to realize the unity of the human family. Each nation has its own distinctive characteristics and culture. The Church recognizes the importance

of national sovereignty and culture, which constitutes the guarantee for the preservation of the identity of a people and expresses and promotes its *spiritual sovereignty*.

Nevertheless, the Church distinguishes a healthy patriotism from an unhealthy nationalism. The fact that some perceive differences and the reality of the “other” as a threat can lead to cycles of violence, obscuring the fundamental commonality that we share as persons. In March 2017, on the occasion of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, Pope Francis addressed the issue of nationalism and its aggressive forms:

“Forms of populism are instead the fruit of an egotism that hems people in and prevents them from overcoming and “looking beyond” their own narrow vision. There is a need to start thinking ... to avert the opposite dangers of a dreary uniformity or *the triumph of particularisms*. Politics needs this kind of leadership, which avoids appealing to emotions to gain consent, but instead, in a spirit of solidarity and subsidiarity.” (POPE FRANCIS, ADDRESS TO HEADS OF STATE ON THE OCCASION OF THE 60<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE TREATY OF ROME, MARCH 24, 2017)

The antidote to an unhealthy nationalism is solidarity, which “entails the awareness of being part of a single body, while at the same time involving a capacity on the part of each member to ‘sympathize’ with others and with the whole.” While the Church is supportive of patriotism and cultures, she rejects a type of nationalism which is closed to other peoples and cultures, based on racial, ethnic and religious difference. As a remedy, she proposes a culture of encounter and solidarity which can serve as the basis of mutual enrichment.

Just last week, in an interview with *Il Sole*, the Holy Father said:

“Nowadays migrants represent a great challenge for everyone. Poor people that move frighten well-off communities especially. Yet a peaceful future for humanity does not exist if not in the welcoming of diversity, solidarity, in thinking of humanity like one unique family. It is natural for a Christian to recognize Jesus in every person. Christ Himself calls upon us to welcome our migrant and refugee brothers and sisters with arms wide open, perhaps taking part in the initiative that I launched in September last year: Share the Journey. The journey, in fact, is made of two: those who come to our land, and we who go toward their heart to understand them, understand their culture, their language, without ignoring the current context. This would be a clear sign of a world and a Church that try to be open, inclusive and welcoming; the Church becomes a mother who embraces everyone in the sharing of a common journey.” (POPE FRANCIS, INTERVIEW WITH IL SOLE 24 ORE, 7 SEPTEMBER 2018)

#### *DIALOGUE AND ACCOMPANIMENT*

Again, we ask: “What should be the response of the Church in the face of the crisis of migrants?”

The rise of an unhealthy nationalism and populism is a result of fear and insecurity – perceiving the other as a threat. Things are changing too quickly for some. The modern period, impacted by globalization, rapid advances in technology and communication, the great movement or displacement of persons, and a loss of a Christian anthropology, has created a diminished

sense of belonging. This is what alienates people, who suffer from insecurity. The noted philosopher Zygmunt Bauman wrote:

“The roots of insecurity are very deep. They are embedded in our way of living; they are marked by the weakness of bonds... by the crumbling of community, by the substitution of human solidarity with competition. The fear generated by this situation of insecurity ... is diffused throughout all the aspects of our life.” (ZYGMENT BAUMAN, “ALLE RADICI DELL’INSICUREZZA,” INTERVISTA A CURA DI D. CASATI, *CORRIERE DELLA SERA*, 26 JULY 2016, P. 7.)

In the face of this existential fear and fear of new people with different languages, customs, and even religions, one approach would simply be to build a wall around ourselves as a means of protection from the unknown, clinging to what is known like a security blanket. The call to build walls, as if we could insulate ourselves from the problem of migration, is not always motivated by prejudice; perhaps, underlying it is genuine fear or at least believing the Sartrean lie, “Hell is other people.”

A physical barrier with a “Keep Out!” sign is not a true solution. That is, it would never rid people of loneliness, interior fear, or fear of the unknown. To keep others out, especially by building walls, remaining closed in on oneself, seems not only to be an affront to human dignity but also suggests that dialogue is impossible. It reflects hopelessness. It is this attitude that the Pope rejects when he says: “Where there is a wall, there is a closed heart. We need bridges, not walls!” (POPE FRANCIS, ANGELUS ADDRESS, 9 NOVEMBER 2015)

The alternative is dialogue. In an interview, the late-Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran stated:

“The response is always and in any case a dialogue, an encounter ... the only possible road is that of an unarmed dialogue. Substantially, in my opinion, to dialogue means to go toward another unarmed, with a conception of truth that is not aggressive, and yet not disoriented.” “There is no other way?” the interviewer asked. “Absolutely not. We are condemned to a dialogue.” (JEAN-LOUIS TAURAN, “UN ALTRO PASSO VERSO L’ABISSO...”, INTERVISTA A CURA DI PAOLO RODARI, *LA REPUBBLICA*, 27 JULY 2016, P. 8.)

At the heart of dialogue is the communication of one’s own life and faith to others. It is a sharing of the existence of others in one’s existence. It is about a mutual sharing of persons that deals with living. As Catholics, our dialogue should express the lived-Christian experience, not as a type of moralism, but as a grace received from our encounter with Christ.

A culture of solidarity and encounter requires an openness to the other manifested in dialogue. In his encyclical letter on ecumenical dialogue, Pope John Paul II wrote:

“Dialogue is an indispensable step along the path *towards human self-realization*, the self-realization both of *each individual* and of *every human community*. Although the concept of dialogue might appear to give priority to the cognitive dimension, all dialogue implies a global, existential dimension. It involves the human subject in his or her entirety ...” (POPE JOHN PAUL II, ENCYCLICAL LETTER *UT UNUM SINT*, 25 MAY 1995, 28)

In *Evangelii Gaudium* (nn. 238-258) the Holy Father speaks of a Church engaged in different forms of dialogue: the dialogue between faith and reason; ecumenical and inter-religious

dialogue; as well as social dialogue and dialogue about religious freedom. To that, we could add dialogue with migrants.

Dialogue is sometimes criticized as not yielding tangible results. People gather, talk, and listen, but in the end, things remain the same. It is important to keep in mind the goal of dialogue: to help shape and form a more just society – “to devise a means for building consensus and agreement while seeking the goal of a just, responsive, and inclusive society.”

Dialogue demands not compromising one’s essential convictions but having a fundamental openness to others. The Holy Father writes:

“True openness involves being steadfast in one’s deepest convictions, while at the same time being ‘open to understanding those of the other party’ and ‘knowing that dialogue can enrich each side.’” (*EVANGELII GAUDIUM*, 251; CF. JOHN PAUL II, *REDEMPTORIS MISSIO*, 7 DECEMBER 1990, 56)

The fruitfulness of the dialogue will be seen in the transformation of those engaged in dialogue. Therefore, we need a Church that *accompanies* migrants and others on their road to Emmaus. During the process of accompaniment, there is time for dialogue, which is more than mere listening. The Holy Father describes how the Church ought to respond:

“We need a Church capable of walking at people’s side, of doing more than simply listening to them; a Church which accompanies them on their journey; a Church able to make sense of the “night” contained in the flight of so many of our brothers and sisters from Jerusalem; a Church which realizes that the reasons why people leave also contain the reasons why they can eventually return. But we need to know how to interpret, with courage, the larger picture. Jesus warmed the hearts of the disciples of Emmaus.” (POPE FRANCIS, ADDRESS TO THE BISHOPS OF BRAZIL, 28 JULY 2013)

Through dialogue, we should discover some *meaningful* responses to the question: What should we do?

### *Conclusion*

How can the Church respond to the crisis of migration? In summary, I would answer: by affirming human dignity and by witnessing concretely to the love that comes to us in Christ Jesus, specifically through the care and respect we show toward those to whom we minister; by standing in solidarity with displaced persons, not only sharing in their experiences and empathizing with them, but also in challenging an unhealthy nationalism; and finally, by accompanying others, dialoging with them along their journey, warming their hearts as Jesus did.

I want to conclude with a few questions, first of my own, and then some of the Holy Father:

1. What is God asking of you personally and collectively in the face of these new people arriving in search of a better future?
2. What distinguishes the work of Catholic Charities from other NGOs?
3. How does the work of Catholic Charities in its outreach to migrants give prophetic witness to the person of Christ and the joy of the Gospel?
4. Does the assistance offered go beyond the material to meet the deeper spiritual needs of the person so that they too might continue their journey?



And these are the Holy Father's questions:

“Are we still a Church capable of warming hearts? A Church capable of leading people back to Jerusalem? Of bringing them home? Jerusalem is where our roots are: Scripture, catechesis, sacraments, community, friendship with the Lord, Mary and the apostles ... Are we still able to speak of these roots in a way that will revive a sense of wonder at their beauty? ...

What is more lofty than the love revealed in Jerusalem? Nothing is more lofty than the abasement of the Cross, since there we truly approach the height of love! Are we still capable of demonstrating this truth to those who think that the apex of life is to be found elsewhere?

Do we know anything more powerful than the strength hidden within the weakness of love, goodness, truth, and beauty? ...

Is the Church still able to move slowly: to take time the time to listen, to have the patience to mend and reassemble? Or is the Church herself caught up in the frantic pursuit of efficiency?” (POPE FRANCIS, ADDRESS TO THE BISHOPS OF BRAZIL, 28 JULY 2013)

My friends, the Holy Father invites us to be a Church that follows the pattern of her Divine Master, walking with those who are in darkness and despair, warming once more their hearts, not with ideology but with the Word of Life, so that those who are wandering in darkness, guided by the light of truth and the fire of love, can recognize His Presence and find their true home - “Jerusalem” - where they can proclaim with us: “The Lord has risen indeed!”