

**HOMILY OF HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL CHRISTOPHE PIERRE  
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
HOLY MASS FOR THE 110<sup>TH</sup> WORLD DAY FOR MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES  
CATHEDRAL OF SAINT MATTHEW – WASHINGTON, D.C.  
SEPTEMBER 29, 2024 (26<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME)**

Brothers and Sisters, good evening!

We know how close to the heart of Pope Francis are migrants and refugees. And so, let me assure you that the Holy Father is spiritually close to you also, as you celebrate the Eucharist together on this World Day for Migrants and Refugees. This year’s theme is: “God walks with his people.” Listen to what Pope Francis said about this theme in his Message for this World Day:

“God not only walks *with* his people, but also *within* them, in the sense that he identifies himself with men and women on their journey through history, particularly with the least, the poor and the marginalized. In this we see an extension of the mystery of the Incarnation.”<sup>1</sup>

We have to think about migrants and refugees with the mind of Christ, and not the way that we are trained to think about them: as a “problem”, as a “political issue”. With the mind of Christ, when we think of migrants and refugees, we remember that they are people who have God within them. As the Pope says, they are “an extension of the mystery of the Incarnation”, which means: they are *God-with-us*.

Not only that, but precisely because they are migrants and refugees – people who are away from home, moving through the world and seeking a new home – they are a representation of *all of us*. We are all away from our true homeland, which is heaven, and we are journeying through a world in which there is hope but also many dangers. This is the life of a migrant, a refugee. It is our life.

Therefore, when we don’t identify with migrants and refugees, we have forgotten who we are. Meeting migrants, taking time for them, listening to them,

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, Message for the 110<sup>th</sup> World Day for Migrants and Refugees, 24 May 2024.

will lead us to encounter Christ who lives in them. This is the incarnational dimension. But something else happens. The migrants and refugees: they teach us. They help us, by bringing us back to the reality of who we really are: pilgrims on a journey. Exiles from our true home, who are seeking a path that will lead to a loving welcome, to full belonging.

These are the great gifts that we miss out on when we treat migrants and refugees as merely a “problem” needing to be “dealt with”, and when we simply try to dismiss them as efficiently as we can so their presence among us doesn’t disrupt our comfortable existence. It is not only that we act against their dignity when we do these things; we also deprive ourselves of an important opportunity, not only to meet Christ, but also to be reminded of who we are, and to be brought back into contact with the true meaning of our lives.

What we are trying to change is this culture of exclusion. It is not new. In every age, a society decides that they are comfortable, secure, and so they say: it’s time to “close the doors”. We have the community we want; we don’t want others, least of all the poor and the needy, to disrupt our life. And so we exclude ... based on race, country of origin, economic status ... whatever.

Our religious ancestors had the same tendency: to exclude people from their community. We see two examples in today’s readings: first, in the Old Testament, and then, in the Gospel.

In the Book of Numbers, when two men who had not come to the tent began to prophesy, Joshua wanted Moses to stop them. But Moses responds, “Would that all the people of the Lord were prophets! Would that the Lord might bestow his spirit on them all!”<sup>2</sup> Moses wants *everyone* to have a share in God’s life. He wants the gifts of God to be shared with all people. How much we benefit when we recognize and welcome the spiritual gifts that migrants bring to us!

In the Gospel of Mark, when someone outside the company of the Apostles was driving out demons in the name of Jesus, John wanted to prevent him. But Jesus

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Numbers* 11:25-29.

lets him be, because he acknowledges God's power at work even outside the close community of his disciples.<sup>3</sup> Whereas the disciples wanted to create divisions, Jesus wanted all people of good will to be united in his name.

This is the culture of inclusion. And so with migrants and refugees, we need to recognize that God not only walks with them, but also that he walks *within* them. Christ lives in them as much as he lives in us. We are called to be, with them, a single human family, together on a journey to our final encounter with Christ.

This is what we are doing in this Eucharistic celebration. When we talk about Christ's presence in the Eucharist, we have to open our eyes to the reality that he is present in each person who celebrates the Eucharist. He is present in each person whom he is calling to belong to his family: to the community that is the Church. If we are to be a Eucharistic people, then we must be an *incarnational* people. We must recognize Christ in each other, especially in the poor, the migrant, the refugee, the person who is treated as the "least". In that person we will we encounter Christ. In that person, we will also encounter ourselves. For we are all exiles. We are all on a journey. And we all need Christ, and each other, to lead us to our true home.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Mark* 9:38-43.