



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS FRANCIS
TO CYPRUS AND GREECE
(2-6 DECEMBER 2021)

ECUMENICAL PRAYER WITH MIGRANTS

Parish Church of the Holy Cross in Nicosia
Friday, 3 December 2021

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

It is a great joy to be here with you and to conclude my visit to Cyprus with this prayer meeting. I thank Patriarchs Pizzaballa and Béchara Raï, and Ms. Elisabeth of Caritas. I greet with affection and gratitude the representatives of the different Christian confessions present in Cyprus.

I want to say, from my heart, a big “thanks” to you, the young migrants who offered your testimonies. I received copies of them in advance, about a month ago. They made a great impression on me then, and again hearing them today. More than just moved, I had the powerful sensation that comes from encountering the beauty of truth. Jesus was moved in that way when he cried out: “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants” (*Mt 11:25*). I too give praise to the heavenly Father because this is happening today, here and throughout the world. God is revealing his Kingdom, his Kingdom of love, justice and peace, to the little ones.

After listening to you, we better understand all the prophetic power of the word of God, who, through the apostle Paul, tells us: “You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God” (*Eph 2:19*). Those words were addressed to the Christians of Ephesus, not far from here, centuries ago, yet those words remain

as timely as ever, as if they were written for us today: “*You are no longer strangers, but fellow citizens*”. This is the prophecy of the Church: a community that, for all its human limitations, incarnates God’s dream. For God too dreams, like you, Mariamie, from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who described yourself as “full of dreams”. Like yourself, God dreams of a world of peace, in which all his children live as brothers and sisters. God *wants* this, God *dreams* of this. We are the ones who don’t want it.

Your presence, migrant brothers and sisters, is very significant for this celebration. Your testimonies are like a “mirror” held up to us, to our Christian communities. When you, Thamara, who come from Sri Lanka, told us that people often ask, “*Who are you?*”: the brutal experience of migration calls our very identity into question. “Is this what I am? I don’t know...Where are my roots? Who am I?” When you ask these questions, you remind us that we too are sometimes asked the same question: “Who are you?” And sadly, all too often, what is really being asked is: “Whose side are you on?”, “What group do you belong to?” Yet as you said, we are not numbers, names on a list; we are “brothers and sisters”, “friends”, “believers”, “neighbours” to one another. Yet when group or political interests, including those of nations, start to push, many of us end up being set aside and without wanting it, become slaves. For interest always enslaves, it always creates slaves. Love, which is expansive and the opposite of hatred, makes us free.

When you, Maccolins, who come from Cameroon, tell us that in the course of your life you have been “*wounded by hate*”, you spoke about this, about these *wounds* inflicted by interests: and you reminded us that hate has also poisoned relationships between us Christians. And this as you said, changes us; it leaves a deep and long-lasting mark. It is a poison. Yes, you made us feel this by the passion with which you spoke. Hate is a poison hard to remove, a twisted mind-set that, instead of letting us see ourselves as brothers and sisters, makes us see one another as enemies, as rivals, or even as objects to be sold or exploited.

When you, Rozh, who come from Iraq, say that you are someone “*on a journey*”, you remind us that we ourselves are a community on a journey; we are journeying *from conflict to communion*. On this road, which is long and has its ups and downs, we should not be afraid of our differences, but afraid of the close-mindedness and prejudice that can prevent us from truly encountering one another and journeying together. Close-mindedness and prejudice re-erect the wall of division, the hostility between us, that Christ tore down (cf. *Eph 2:14*). Our journey towards full unity can only advance to the extent that, together, we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, on him who is “our peace” (ibid.), the “cornerstone” (v. 20). It is he, the Lord Jesus, whom we encounter in the faces of our marginalized and discarded brothers and sisters. In the face of the migrant who is despised, rejected, put in a cage, exploited... But at the same time – as you said – the face of the migrant journeying to a goal, to a hope, to greater human companionship...

In all these ways, God speaks to us through your dreams. The danger is that many times we do not let our dreams in, we would rather sleep and not dream. It is easy to look the other way. And in

this world we have grown accustomed to a culture of indifference, a culture of looking the other way and thus sleeping peacefully. Yet that way it is impossible to dream. God speaks through your dreams. God does not speak through people who are dreamless, because they have everything or because their hearts are hardened. God calls us not to be content with a divided world, content with divided Christian communities, but to journey through history drawn by his own dream: the dream of a humanity freed of walls of division, freed of hostility, where there are no longer strangers, but only fellow citizens, as we heard Paul say in the passage I just mentioned. Fellow citizens who are diverse, yet proud of that diversity and individuality, which are God's gifts. Diverse, proud to be diverse, but always reconciled, always brothers and sisters.

May this island, marked by a painful division – from here I can see that wall – become by God's grace a *workshop of fraternity*. I thank all those who are working to make that happen. We must realize that this island is generous, but it cannot do everything, since the number of people arriving is greater than their possibilities of insertion, integrating, accompanying and promoting. Its geographical closeness may make it easier... but it is not easy. We must understand the limits to which the island's leaders are bound. But on this island, and I have seen this in the leaders I have met, a commitment to become, by God's grace, a workshop of freedom. And it will, if two things can happen. First, an effective recognition of the dignity of every human person (cf. *Fratelli Tutti*, 8). Our dignity is not up for sale; it cannot be rented out; it must not be squandered. Hold your head high and say: I am a child of God; I have my *dignity*. The effective recognition of this dignity is the ethical foundation, a universal foundation, which is also at the core of Christian social doctrine. Second, a trusting openness to God the Father of all; this is the "leaven" that we, as believers, are called to offer (cf. *ibid.*, 272).

If these two things can happen, the *dream* can translate into a daily *journey*, made up of concrete steps from conflict to communion, from *hate* to *love*, from escape to encounter. A patient journey, which day by day leads us to the land God has prepared for us. The land where, when people ask "Who are you?", you can readily respond, "Look, I am your brother, your sister. Don't you recognize me?" And then, go your way in peace.

As I listen to you and see your faces, I am reminded of another thing: your suffering. You arrived here, but how many of your brothers and sisters are still making the journey? How many desperate people have set out in difficult and precarious conditions, but did not arrive? We can think about this sea, which has become a great cemetery. Looking at you, I see the suffering caused by your journey; I see all those people who were kidnapped, sold, exploited... and who are still on the journey, we know not where. We are speaking of slavery, of universal enslavement. We see what is happening, and the worst thing is that *we are becoming used to it*. "Oh yes, today another boat capsized... so many lives were lost...." This "*becoming used*" to things is a grave illness, a very grave illness, and there is no antibiotic for it! We have to resist this vice of getting used to reading about these tragedies in the newspapers or hearing about them on other media.

Looking at you, I think too of all those people who had to return because they were turned away and ended up in concentration camps, real concentration camps, where the women have been sold, and men tortured and enslaved... We are appalled when we read stories of the concentration camps of the last century, those of the Nazis or those of Stalin, and we say: "How could this possibly have happened?" Brothers and sisters, it is happening today, on nearby coasts! Places of enslavement. I have seen some filmed testimonies about this: places of torture and human trafficking. I say all this because it is my responsibility to help open people's eyes to this reality. Forced migration is not a kind of "tourism"! And our sinfulness leads us to think: "Those poor people, those poor people!", and with those words, "poor people", we blot everything out. This is today's war: the suffering of our brothers and sisters, which we cannot pass over in silence. Brothers and sisters who left everything behind to get on a boat, in the dark of night, and then... without knowing if they would ever arrive. And all those who were turned away and ended up in the concentration camps, true places of torture and enslavement.

Such is the story of this *developed civilization* that we call *the West*. And then – forgive me, but here I would like to say what is in my heart, at least so that we can pray for one another and do something – and then, there is the barbed wire. We see it here: it is part of a war of hatred dividing a country. Yet in other places, barbed wire is set up to prevent the entrance of refugees, those who come in search of freedom, food, assistance, fraternity, joy, those fleeing from hatred but then find themselves facing a form of hatred called barbed wire. May the Lord awaken the conscience of us all before these realities.

Excuse me if I have spoken of things as they really are, but we cannot remain silent and look the other way amid this culture of indifference.

May the Lord bless all of you! Thank you.