



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

to MARSEILLE

for the conclusion of the "Rencontres Méditerranéennes"

[22 - 23 september 2023]

MOMENT OF REFLECTION WITH RELIGIOUS LEADERS NEAR THE MEMORIAL DEDICATED TO SAILORS AND MIGRANTS LOST AT SEA

INTERVENTION OF HIS HOLINESS

Marseille

Friday, 22 September 2023

[Multimedia]

Dear brothers and sisters,

Thank you for being here. Before us is the sea, a source of life, yet this place evokes the tragedy of shipwrecks, which cause death. We are gathered in memory of those who did not make it, who were not saved. Let us not get used to considering shipwrecks as news stories, and deaths at sea as numbers: no, they are names and surnames, they are faces and stories, they are broken lives and shattered dreams. I think of so many brothers and sisters drowned in fear, along with the hopes they carried in their hearts. Faced with such a drama, we need deeds, not words. Before that, however, we need to show some humanity: we need silence, weeping, compassion and prayer. I now invite you to spend a moment of silence in memory of these brothers and sisters of ours: let us be moved by their tragedies. *[Moment of silence]*

Too many people, fleeing conflict, poverty and environmental disasters in their search for a better future, find in the waves of the Mediterranean Sea the ultimate rejection. And so this beautiful sea has become a huge cemetery, where many brothers and sisters are deprived even of the right to a

grave. Being buried at sea is the only dignity given them. In the book-testimony “Little Brother,” the protagonist, at the end of the troubled journey that takes him from the Republic of Guinea to Europe, says, “When you sit above the sea you are at a crossroads. On one side is life, on the other is death. There are no other choices” (A. Arzallus Antia - I. Balde, *Fratellino*, Milan 2021, 107). Dear friends, we too are at a crossroads: on the one hand, there is fraternity, which makes the human community flourish with goodness; on the other, indifference, which bloodies the Mediterranean. We find ourselves at a *crossroads of civilization*. Either the culture of humanity and fraternity, or the culture of indifference: let everyone fend for himself or herself.

We cannot be resigned to seeing human beings treated as bargaining chips, imprisoned and tortured in atrocious ways; we know that many times, when we send them away, they are destined to be tortured and imprisoned. We can no longer watch the drama of shipwrecks, caused by the cruel trafficking and the fanaticism of indifference. Indifference becomes fanatical. People who are at risk of drowning when abandoned on the waves must be rescued. It is a duty of humanity; it is a duty of civilization!

God will bless us, if on land and at sea we know how to take care of the weakest, if we can overcome the paralysis of fear and the disinterest that, with velvet gloves, condemns others to death. In this, we representatives of different religions are called to be an example. God, indeed, blessed father Abraham. He was called to leave his homeland: “not knowing where he was to go” (*Heb* 11:8). As a guest and pilgrim in a foreign land, he welcomed the wayfarers who passed by his tent (cf. *Gen* 18): “exiled from his homeland and homeless himself, he was both a home and homeland for all” (Peter Chrysologus, *Discourses*, 121). And “as a reward for his hospitality, he received the gift of posterity” (Ambrose, *De officiis*, II, 21). Thus, at the roots of the three Mediterranean monotheistic religions is hospitality, love for the stranger in the name of God. And this is vital if, like our father Abraham, we dream of a prosperous future. Let us not forget the Biblical refrain: “the orphan, the widow and the migrant, the foreigner”. Orphans, widows and foreigners: these are the ones God commands us to cherish.

We believers, then, must be exemplary in mutual and fraternal welcome. Relations between religious groups are often not easy, with the woodworm of extremism and the ideological plague of fundamentalism that corrodes the authentic life of communities. In this regard, I would like to echo what a man of God who lived not far from here wrote: “Let no one keep in his heart hatred for his neighbour, but love, instead, for if a man feels hatred toward even one person, he cannot be at peace with God. A man’s prayer is not heard by God as long as anger is stored up in his soul” (Caesarius of Arles, *Discourses*, XIV, 2).

Today, Marseille too, characterized by a diverse religious pluralism, stands at a crossroads: encounter or confrontation. I thank all of you, who choose the path of encounter: thank you for your solidarity and concrete commitment to promoting human development and integration. Marseille is a model of integration. It is good that you have here, along with various groups that

work with migrants, *Marseille-Espérance*, an organization for interreligious dialogue that promotes fraternity and peaceful coexistence. We look to the pioneers and witnesses of dialogue, such as Jules Isaac, who lived nearby and whose sixtieth anniversary of death was recently commemorated. You are the Marseille of the future. Go forward without discouragement, so that this city may be for France, Europe and the world a *mosaic of hope*.

As a parting wish, I would like to quote some words of David Sassoli spoken in Bari, on the occasion of a previous meeting on the Mediterranean: “In Baghdad, in the House of Wisdom of Caliph Al Ma’mun, Jews, Christians and Muslims used to meet to read the sacred books and Greek philosophers. Today we all feel, believers and non-believers alike, the need to rebuild that house to continue together to fight idols, tear down walls, build bridges, and give substance to a new humanism. To look deeply at our own time and to love it even more when it is hard to love is, I believe, the seed sown in these days when we are so attentive to our destiny. Stop being afraid of the problems that the Mediterranean subjects us to. [...] For the European Union and for all of us, our survival depends on this” (*Address on the occasion of the Reflection and Spirituality Meeting “Mediterranean Frontier of Peace,”* 22 February 2020).

Brothers, sisters, let us face these problems together; let us not cause hope to shipwreck; let us together make a mosaic of peace!

I am pleased to see here so many of you who go to sea to rescue migrants. And many times you are prevented from going, because – so they say - the ship is lacking something, lacking this, lacking that... These are acts of hatred against our brothers and sisters, in the guise of “balance”. Thank you for everything you do.