



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE **BOLLETTINO**

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General Audience

This morning's General Audience took place at 9.00 in Saint Peter's Square, where the Holy Father Francis met with groups of pilgrims and faithful from Italy and all over the world.

In his address in Italian, the Pope focused on the theme: "*Sea and desert*" (Bible reading: *Ps 107:1,4-6*).

After summarizing his catechesis in various languages, the Holy Father addressed special greetings to the faithful present.

The General Audience concluded with the recitation of the *Pater Noster* and the Apostolic Blessing.

The following text includes parts that were not read out loud, but should be considered as such.

Catechesis of the Holy Father: Sea and desert

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Today, I will postpone the usual catechesis and I would like to pause with you to think about the people who – even at this moment – are crossing seas and deserts to reach a land where they can live in peace and safety.

Sea and desert: these two words return in many testimonies I receive, both on the part of migrants, and of people who are engaged in coming to their aid. And when I say "sea", in the context of migrations, I also mean

ocean, lake, river, all the insidious bodies of water that so many brothers and sisters all over the world are forced to cross to reach their destination. And “desert” is not only that of sand and dunes, or rocks, but they are also those inaccessible and dangerous territories, such as forests, jungles, steppes where migrants walk alone, left to their own devices. Migrants, sea and desert. Today’s migratory routes are often marked by crossings of seas and deserts, which for many, too many people – too many! – are deadly. Therefore, today I want to dwell on this drama, this pain. Some of these routes we know well, because they are often in the spotlight; others, the majority, are little known, but no less

I have spoken about the Mediterranean many times, because I am the Bishop of Rome and because it is emblematic: the *mare nostrum*, a place of communication between peoples and civilizations, has become – the *mare nostrum* – it has become a cemetery. And the tragedy is that many, the majority of these deaths, could have been prevented. It must be said clearly: there are those who work systematically and with every means possible to repel migrants – to repel migrants. And this, when done with awareness and responsibility, is a grave sin. Let us not forget what the Bible tells us: “You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him” (Ex 22:21). The orphan, the widow and the stranger are the quintessential poor whom God always defends and asks to be defended.

Some deserts too, unfortunately, are becoming cemeteries of migrants. And even here it is not always a question of “natural” deaths. No. At times, they have been taken to the desert and abandoned. We all know the photograph of the wife and daughter of Pato, who died of hunger and thirst in the desert. In the time of satellites and drones, there are migrant men, women and children that no-one must see: they are hidden. Only God sees them and hears their cry. And this is a cruelty of our civilization.

Indeed, the sea and the desert are also biblical places, loaded with symbolic value. They are very important scenes in the history of the exodus, the great migration of the people led by God through Moses from Egypt to the promised Land. These places witness the drama of the people fleeing oppression and slavery. They are places of suffering, fear, and desperation, but at the same time they are places of passage for liberation – and how many people cross the seas and the deserts to free themselves, today – they are places of passage for redemption, to reach freedom and the fulfilment of God’s promises (cf. *Message for World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2024*).

There is a Psalm which says to the Lord: “Thy way was through the sea / Thy path through the great waters” (77:19). And another says that He “led His people through the wilderness / for His steadfast love endures forever” (136:16). These words, blessed words tell us that, to accompany the people on their journey to freedom, God Himself crosses the sea and the desert; God does not remain at a distance, no; He shares in the migrants’ drama, God is there with them, with the migrants, He suffers with them, with the migrants, He weeps and hopes with them, with the migrants. It will be good for us today: the Lord is with our migrants in the *mare nostrum*, the Lord is with them, not with those who repel them.

Brothers and sisters, we can all agree on one thing: migrants should not be in those seas and in those lethal deserts. But it is not through more restrictive laws, it is not with the militarization of borders, it is not with rejection that we will obtain this result. Instead, we will obtain it by extending safe and legal access routes for migrants, providing refuge for those who free from war, violence, persecution and various disasters; we will obtain it by promoting in every way a global governance of migration based on justice, fraternity and solidarity. And by joining forces to combat human trafficking, to stop the criminal traffickers who mercilessly exploit the misery of others.

I wish to conclude by acknowledging and praising the commitment of the many good Samaritans who do their utmost to rescue and save injured and abandoned migrants on the routes of desperate hope, in the five continents. These courageous men and women are a sign of a humanity that does not allow itself to be contaminated by the malign culture of indifference and rejection – it is our indifference and that attitude of rejection that kills migrants. And those who cannot stay with them “on the front line” – I think of the many good people who are there on the front line, with Mediterranean Saving Humans and so many other associations – are not therefore excluded from this fight for civilization. We cannot be on the front line but we are not excluded;

there are many ways to make a contribution, first and foremost prayer. And I ask you: do you pray for migrants, for those who come to our lands to save their lives? And then they want to send them away...

Dear brothers and sisters, let us join our hearts and forces, so that the seas and deserts are not cemeteries, but spaces where God may open up roads to freedom and fraternity.

Greeting in English

I extend a warm welcome to the English-speaking pilgrims taking part in today's Audience, especially the group of students and teachers from Norway. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. May God bless you!
