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In their hearts they long for a better future

Pope Francis

From the Christian standpoint, the reality of migration points to the tension between the beauty of creation and the mystery of sin. Solidarity, acceptance, signs of fraternity and understanding exist side by side with rejection, discrimination, trafficking and exploitation, suffering and death.

Yet despite the problems, risks and difficulties to be faced, great numbers of migrants and refugees continue to be inspired by confidence and hope; in their hearts they long for a better future, not only for themselves, but for their families and those closest to them.

What is involved in the creation of a better world? Pope Paul VI described the hopes of people today in this way: “to secure a sure food supply, cures for diseases and steady employment ... to exercise greater personal responsibility; to do more, to learn more, and to have more, in order to be more.”

Causes of migration

Migrants and refugees are not pawns on the chessboard of humanity. They are children, women and men who leave or are forced to leave their homes for various reasons, who share a legitimate desire for knowing and having, but above all, for being more. The sheer number of people migrating from one continent to another, or shifting places within their own countries and geographical areas is striking. Contemporary movements of migration represent the largest movement of individuals, if not of peoples, in history. As the church accompanies migrants and refugees on their journey, she seeks to understand the causes of migration, but also works to overcome its negative effects, and to maximize its positive influence on the communities of origin, transit and destination.

Fleeing from situations of extreme poverty or persecution in the hope of a better future, or simply to save their own lives,



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millions of persons choose to migrate. Despite their hopes and expectations, they often encounter mistrust, rejection and exclusion, to say nothing of tragedies and disasters which offend their human dignity.

Not infrequently, the arrival of migrants, displaced persons, asylum-seekers gives rise to suspicion and hostility. There is a fear that society will become less secure, that identity and culture will be lost, that competition for jobs will become stiffer and even that criminal activity will increase. A change of attitude towards migrants and refugees is needed on the part of everyone ... towards attitudes based on a culture of encounter, the only culture capable of building a better, more just and fraternal world.

I think of how the Holy Family experienced initial rejection; Mary “gave birth to her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for

them in the inn.” Jesus, Mary and Joseph knew what it meant to leave their own country and become migrants: threatened by Herod’s lust for power, they were forced to take flight and seek refuge in Egypt.

The church ... is called to be the People of God which embraces all peoples and brings to them the proclamation of the Gospel. The face of each person bears the mark of the face of Christ.

Every human being is a child of God. He or she bears the image of God. We need to see, and then enable others to see, that migrants and refugees do not only represent a problem to be solved, but are brothers and sisters to be welcomed, respected and loved.

Dear migrants and refugees: Never lose hope that you are facing a more secured future, that on your journey you will encounter an outstretched hand and experience solidarity and the warmth of friendship. ■