Pope Francis opens his 2018 World Day of Peace Message (released in November, 2017) with a prayer for peace for all people, and especially for who those who “most keenly suffer its absence,” those who are on difficult journey, searching for a place of peace so they may know the security of a home and be able to live in dignity. In this recent message, he brings our attention once again to the current plight of the more than 250 million migrants and refugees worldwide, reemphasizing that they are escaping from conflict, violence, discrimination, poverty, and hunger, and also from the effects of environmental degradation and climate change, as he noted in Laudato Si’. He asks us to understand the desperation that drives many migrants to take terrible risks to leave their homes for difficult journeys to unknown futures.

Pope Francis repeatedly call us to compassion for these people and challenges us to support measures that will tear down all the interior and exterior “fences and walls” erected in fear to keep out the other. Acknowledging that it is difficult to overcome all the complex problems related to resettlement and the reality of limited resources for migrants and refugees, he, nevertheless, emphasizes that it is possible, with an authentic commitment and a continuing vigilance, to build up networks that will develop compassionate as well as realistic solutions.

His message begins with a call to hope, a call that has become a motif of his papacy, a call that encourages us to practice the virtue of hope so we can become empowered to work out the very challenging problems of our time. To do so, the inner work and discipline of practicing hope must be the ground from which we act. For migrants and refugees, it is often just a fragile hope for a better life that compels them to the perilous journeys they embark on. We are called to respect this hope, fragile as it may be, and to respond to Pope Francis’s call by making a commitment to practice hope ourselves, and also to act, guided by the wisdom our pope offers.

The Spirituality of Solidarity

Pope Francis continues exploring the spirituality of solidarity as he discusses the “contemplative gaze” in his 2018 World Day of Peace Message. His phrase refers to discerning the migrant situation from an inner perspective, taking a view of the current situation through the lenses of compassion and hope and seeing from a compassionate and loving orientation. He refers to basic Catholic social teaching when he quotes Pope Benedict XVI (2011 Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees) as recognizing that through such orientation we can recognize that all people “belong to one family, migrants, and the local populations that welcome them, and all have the same right to enjoy the goods of the earth, whose destination is universal, as the social doctrine of the Church teaches. It is here that solidarity and sharing are founded.”
Pope Francis reminds us these social teachings are grounded in Scripture as he refers to images of the new Jerusalem from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah and from the New Testament book of Revelation. This new holy space will be a place of peace and justice, where people of all nations are welcome, a place we can begin to lay the foundation of today, if we recognize that God dwells among us, calling us to actively fulfill the promise of peace and to welcome God’s children and thus end their weary journey.

A Positive View

Pope Francis offers another perspective on the ongoing global migration that is reshaping our global community: he asks that we view this migration not as a threat but as an opportunity to build new forms of peace under just international leadership (discussed below). We are also challenged by Pope Francis to see these journeying children of God in a positive way:

“When we turn [the contemplative] gaze to migrants and refugees, we discover that they do not arrive empty-handed. They bring their courage, skills, energy and aspirations, as well as the treasures of their own cultures; and in this way, they enrich the lives of the nations that receive them. We also come to see the creativity, tenacity and spirit of sacrifice of the countless individuals, families and communities around the world who open their doors and hearts to migrants and refugees, even where resources are scarce.

“Those who see things in this way will be able to recognize the seeds of peace that are already sprouting and nurture their growth. Our cities, often divided and polarized by conflicts regarding the presence of migrants and refugees, will thus turn into workshops of peace.”

Just Leadership

Seeing what can be possible, Pope Francis pointedly addresses those in power, challenging them to the inner and outer work of just leadership: “By practicing the virtue of prudence, government leaders should take practical measures to welcome, promote, protect, integrate and, ‘within the limits allowed by a correct understanding of the common good, to permit [them] to become part of a new society’.” Those who inflame their citizens by focusing only on possible risks to national security or who begrudge the cost of welcoming migrants are sharply taken to task by Pope Francis: they demean the human dignity that is due to all as sons and daughters of God, and, instead of building peace “are sowing violence, racial discrimination, and xenophobia, which are matters of great concern for all those concerned for the safety of every human being.”
International cooperation must be the positive way ahead: Pope Francis reminds us that global dialogue and coordination should be a specific duty for the international community. Thus, he urges United Nations members to approve two proposed Global Compacts that call for safe, orderly, and regular migration and the well-being of refugees. The pope declares that these compacts will provide an international framework for policy proposals and practical measures that need to be taken for the global common good, such as funding for poorer countries who have taken in high numbers of refugees. Again, he urges that such measures need to be inspired and grounded by the inner practices of compassion and courage: “Only in this way can the realism required of international politics avoid surrendering to cynicism and to the globalization of indifference.”

Church Support

The Vatican’s Migrants and Refugees Section of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development has published a set of 20 action points to provide concrete ideas for public policy and “to shape the attitudes and activities” of Christian communities. These action points include enhancing safe and legal channels for migrants and refugees, such as humanitarian visas and family reunification visas; humanitarian corridor programs; temporary protective status, and more. (To see full details go to: [http://bit.ly/2iOV9oZ](http://bit.ly/2iOV9oZ).) The action points also discuss very specific policies and programs recommended to nation states to protect the dignity and rights of immigrants and migrants. Additionally, the action points describe further policies, programs, and actions to promote the integration of immigrants and refugees into their new communities and to support their integral human development in these communities.

Pope Francis wants to make it clear the Catholic Church sees these recommended actions and his support of the two U.N. Global Compacts as a part of a tradition of social concerns and of “the more general pastoral concern that goes back to very origins of Church and has continued in her many works up to the present time.” Care for the least of these goes back to Christ’s teaching and is a fundamental part of following His example to care for those on the margins.

Graced Strategies

Pope Francis declares that providing all refugees, migrants, and victims of human trafficking an opportunity “to find the peace they seek” requires a strategy of welcoming, protecting, promoting, and integrating. In his description of these actions, Francis reminds us again that they have a Scriptural base and are rooted in our faith tradition:

“‘Welcoming’ calls for expanding legal pathways for entry and no longer pushing migrants and displaced people towards countries where they face persecution and violence. It also demands balancing our concerns about national security with concern for fundamental human rights. Scripture reminds us: ‘Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it’” (Hebrews 13:2).
REFLECTION: CST

“Protecting” has to do with our duty to recognize and defend the inviolable dignity of those who flee real dangers in search of asylum and security, and to prevent their being exploited. I think in particular of women and children who find themselves in situations that expose them to risks and abuses that can even amount to enslavement. God does not discriminate: “The Lord watches over the foreigner and sustains the orphan and the widow” (Psalm 146:9).

“Promoting” entails supporting the integral human development of migrants and refugees. Among many possible means of doing so, I would stress the importance of ensuring access to all levels of education for children and young people. This will enable them not only to cultivate and realize their potential, but also better equip them to encounter others and to foster a spirit of dialogue rather than rejection or confrontation. The Bible teaches that God ‘loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt’” (Deuteronomy 10:18-19).

“Integrating,” lastly, means allowing refugees and migrants to participate fully in the life of the society that welcomes them, as part of a process of mutual enrichment and fruitful cooperation in service of the integral human development of the local community. Saint Paul expresses it in these words: “You are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people” (Ephesians 2:19).

Models of Hope and Welcome

At the conclusion of the papal 2018 World Day of Peace Message, Pope Francis holds up two saints as beacons of hope, who realized in their own lifetime some of the fruits of justice and peace. They call us to see that it is not naïve to seek a better world and that something can always be done to ease suffering and promote peace. He quotes St. Pope John Paul II, who survived the brutality of World War II and the years of Russian domination of his native country to witness the growth of peace and freedom in Europe after the mass migrations of WWII. John Paul II remarked: “If the ‘dream’ of a peaceful world is shared by all, if the refugees’ and migrants’ contribution is properly evaluated, then humanity can become more and more a universal family and our earth a true ‘common home’” (John Paul II, Message for the 2004 World Day of Migrants and Refugees).

Another model, especially for the U.S., is St. Francis Xavier Cabrini, who immigrated from Italy to the United States in 1889 and devoted her life to the care of impoverished and often despised immigrants, building up a network of scores of schools and hospitals. She is held up as one of many who believed that immigrants did have value and could offer gifts to shape their new communities and their nation if they were give some basic supports; she teaches us “to welcome, protect, promote and integrate our brothers and sisters.” Pope Francis ends his message praying that, through the intercession of St. Francis Xavier Cabrini, our Lord will “enable all of us to experience that ‘a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace’.”

As we begin a new year, Pope Francis calls us to the spirituality of solidarity, to experience the peace of the goodness of God, to practice peace, hope and compassion so we are moved to act with resolve and joy, knowing we are blessed by this call. May his message be heard far and wide throughout this world in this coming year.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

• Pope Francis has been continually calling for recognition and respect for immigrants and refugees since the early days of his papacy. How does he link concern for these people with peace in the global community? Why does he feel the need to keep the focus on immigrants and refugees? How does this focus relate to the basic teachings of Christ and to the Church’s social concerns?

• Why does Pope Francis remind us that we must practice hope as an interior discipline if we want to promote justice and peace for immigrants and refugees? What kind of interior shifts do we have to make to see all human beings, including immigrants and refugees, with a “contemplative gaze?” Why is the spiritual inner work so important for the promotion of justice and peace?

• Why has the Vatican’s office of Immigrants issued specific guidelines for responding to the situation of mass immigration? How can these guidelines be promoted around the world, and what can your faith communities do to share them?

• Why do you think Pope Francis held up both St. John Paul II and St. Francis Xavier Cabrini as models for the Church community today? What does his choice of an American immigrant who worked with and for other immigrants as a model of faith suggest?

FAITH IN ACTION

• Print out the Vatican’s Migrants and Refugees concrete action steps: http://bit.ly/2iOV9oZ. Mail and copies to as many of the Catholic lawmakers in Congress as you can, asking them to consider these action steps carefully. See list of Catholic Senate members at: http://bit.ly/2jQ6bGR. Letters can be sent to:
  
  Office of Senator (Name)
  United States Senate
  Washington, D.C. 20510

PRAYER

Christ, your family knew the desperation of fleeing from violence as they walked on the difficult journey to Egypt when you were a small child. Years later, you were a wanderer, “with no place” to lie your head. Today, You suffer with all those on desperate journeys, leaving their homes with little but hope, waiting for welcome, longing for a home. May we see You in the faces of immigrants, migrants, and refugees, and may we practice hope as we work for justice and peace for the least of these, recognizing them as your beloved children. Amen.