



Missionary Prayer Intention - The Pope's missionary prayer intention for January 2006: "For migrants: may they be recognised as persons created in the image and likeness of God and welcomed with respect and charity"

Comment by Archbishop Silvano M. Tomasi C.S., Holy See permanent observer to the United Nations and International Organisations in Geneva

Geneva (Fides Service) - Today more than 200 million people in the world live and work in a country which is not the one in which they were born. This is a sign of the times and a phenomenon which transforms whole countries. Migrants were remembered by the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI at the midday Angelus prayer on Sunday June 5 on the occasion of the first centenary of the death of Blessed Giovanni Battista Scalabrini (1839-1905) described by John Paul II "the father of migrants: "May they always meet friendly and welcoming faces to help them overcome their daily difficulties". With these words the Pope summarised the traditional love for migrants shown by the Church's saints such as Mother Francesca Saverio Cabrini, John Neuman, Scalabrini, and indicated the path for the future: offering a warm welcome.

The Gospel says that welcome was characteristic of Jesus' manner of relating to others: he welcomes the crowds, teaches them about the Kingdom of God and heals those who are sick (Lk 9,11); he even welcomes sinners and shares a meal with them (Lk 15.1-2); he is present in welcome assuring his disciples : «he who welcomes you welcomes me and the One who sent me» (Mt 10, 40). Listening to the Master's teaching Maestro, St Paul the apostle recommends the first Christian communities to: «welcome one another as Christ welcomed you » (Rom 15,7). Therefore Christian welcoming is without limits or prejudice of race, skin colour of culture indeed it is a test for the Last Judgement. Blessed and saved are those who welcome because in every person in need there is hidden the Son of God: «I was hungry and you gave me to eat, thirsty and you gave me to drink, a stranger and you welcomed me» (Mt 25,35).

A person open to the message of the Gospel can never be indifferent to an encounter with another person. Love, which must be the uniform of every Christian, demands an attitude of positive openness expressed successively in behaviour of active service of the stranger who leaves his land in search of a new land and a better future for himself and his loved ones. Fair policies and laws, worthy structures, transparent procedures, openness to constructive coexistence become visible expression of love which extends to sharing of values and goods and build communion in appreciation for diversity in reciprocal and harmonious exchange which embraces rights and duties for all and respects the dignity and freedom of every human person.

There is no place therefore for territorial or social segregation, chosen or imposed, as the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church teaches in particular in documents concerning migrants such as *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi*. A warm welcome opens the way for integration and makes migration, often marked by unjust economic unbalance and painful uprooting, a resource for the development of the country of origin and arrival. Hence welcome is a dimension of love of neighbour and therefore becomes genuine «Christian witness». It is more than simple acceptance of cultural diversity because it seals willingness to build together a future of peace and mutual enrichment, taking as a basis biblical revelation with regard to the unity of the human family emerging from universal brotherhood marked by the shared «image and likeness» of the Creator (Gen 1,26-27).

However welcome is not only a Christian duty and a context for economic success and good social-political integration. To a certain extent it helps us see migration as an important opportunity for reflection, religious dialogue and mission. Migrants in fact, shaken by the profound changes which their experience involves, are faced with new roles, new mentalities, solitude and have to ask themselves once again about the meaning of life and what answer can come from religion. It is now clear that the missions are here with us in the new peoples who come from afar and present a challenge for explicit proclamation of the Gospel message, the highest act of charity

we can exercise in their regard. Finally, Catholic migrants, often a consistent part of new migratory waves, can be witnesses of Christian life in the hosting environment. Here then we have migration as a new pulpit for the mission of the Christian community and a “warm welcome” is the initial keystone to overcoming inevitable difficulties and broadening the dimensions of charity. (Archbishop Silvano M. Tomasi, c.s.) (Agenzia Fides 15/12/2005; righe 49, parole 712)