



# The Holy See

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POPE FRANCIS **GENERAL AUDIENCE** St Peter's Square

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## 34. Works of welcoming the stranger and clothing the naked

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

Let us continue to reflect on the corporal works of mercy, which the Lord Jesus gave us in order to keep our faith ever alive and dynamic. These works, indeed, show that Christians are not weary and idle as they await the final encounter with the Lord, but each day go to meet him, recognizing his face in those of the many people who ask for help. Today let us concentrate on these words of Jesus: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me” (Mt 25:35-36). In our time, charitable action regarding foreigners is more relevant than ever. The economic crisis, armed conflicts and climate change force many people to emigrate. However, migration is not a new phenomenon, it is part of the history of humanity. It is a lack of historical memory to think that this phenomenon has only arisen in recent years.

The Bible offers us many concrete examples of migration. Suffice it to think of Abraham. God’s call spurred him to leave his country in order to go to another: “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you” (Gen 12:1). It was so also for the people of Israel, who from Egypt, where they were slaves, went marching in the desert for 40 years until they reached the land promised by God. The Holy Family itself — Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus — were forced to emigrate in order to escape Herod’s threat: Joseph “rose and took the child and his mother by night, and departed to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod” (Mt 2:14-15). The history of mankind is a history of migrations: on every latitude, there is no people that has not known the migratory phenomenon.

Over the course of the centuries we have witnessed, in this regard, great expressions of solidarity, although there has been no lack of social tension. Today, the context of the economic crisis unfortunately fosters the emergence of attitudes of closure and not of welcome. In some parts of the world walls and barriers are going up. At times it seems that the silent work of so many men and women who, in various ways, do all they can to help and assist the refugees and migrants, is obscured by the clamour of others who give voice to an instinctive selfishness. However, closure

is not a solution, but instead it ends up fostering criminal trafficking. The only way to a solution is that of solidarity. Solidarity with the migrant, solidarity with the foreigner....

The commitment of Christians in this field is as urgent today as it was in the past. Looking only at the last century, we recall the splendid figure of Saint Frances Cabrini, who dedicated her life, along with her companions, to immigrants to the United States of America. Today too we need these witnesses so that mercy may reach the many who are in need. It is a commitment that involves everyone, without exception. We all, dioceses, parishes, institutes of consecrated life, associations and movements, as individual Christians, are called to welcome our brothers and sisters who are fleeing from war, from hunger, from violence and from inhuman living conditions. All together we are a great supportive force for those who have lost their homeland, family, work and dignity.

Several days ago, a little story took place in the city. There was a refugee who was looking for a street and a lady approached him and said: "Are you looking for something?". That refugee had no shoes, and he said: "I would like to go to Saint Peter's to enter the Holy Door". And the lady thought: "But he has no shoes, how will he manage to walk there?". And she called a taxi. But the migrant, that refugee had a disagreeable odour and the taxi driver almost didn't want him to get in, but in the end he let him board the taxi. And the lady, sitting next to him during the ride, asked him a little about his history as a refugee and migrant: it took 10 minutes to get here. This man told his story of suffering, of war, of hunger because he had fled from his homeland in order to migrate here. When they arrived, the lady opened her purse to pay the taxi driver — who at first had not wanted this immigrant to board because he smelled — told her: "No, ma'am, I should be paying you because you made me listen to a story that has changed my heart". This lady knew what a migrant's pain is, because she was of Armenian descent and knew the suffering of her people. When we do something like this, at first we refuse because it causes us a little inconvenience, "but... he smells...". In the end, the episode gives fragrance to our soul and changes us. Consider this story and let us think about what we can do for refugees.

And the other thing is to clothe the naked: what does it mean if not to restore dignity to one who has lost it? Certainly giving clothing to one who has none; but let us also think about the women victims of trafficking, cast onto the streets, or of other many ways of using the human body as a commodity, even that of minors. Likewise, not having a job, a house, a fair wage are forms of nakedness; being discriminated against on account of race, of faith, are all forms of "nakedness", to which as Christians we are called to be attentive, vigilant and ready to act.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us not fall into the trap of closing in on ourselves, indifferent to the needs of brothers and sisters and concerned only with our own interests. It is precisely in the measure to which we open ourselves to others that life becomes fruitful, society regains peace and people recover their full dignity. Do not forget that lady, do not forget that migrant who had a disagreeable odour and do not forget that driver whose spirit was changed by the immigrant.

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**Special greetings:**

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, particularly those from England, Wales, Ireland, Finland, Norway, Israel, Australia, Indonesia, China, Japan, Canada and the United States of America. With prayerful good wishes that the present Jubilee of Mercy will be a moment of grace and spiritual renewal for you and your families, I invoke upon all of you joy and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Lastly I offer my greeting to *young people*, to *the sick* and to *newlyweds*. At the end of the month of October I wish to recommend praying the Rosary. May this simple Marian prayer indicate to you, dear *young people*, the way to interpret God's will in your life. Love this prayer, dear *sick people*, because it brings with it consolation for mind and heart. May it become for you, dear *newlyweds*, a privileged moment of spiritual intimacy in your new family.