



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE CONFERENCE PROMOTED BY
MISSIONARIES OF SAINT CHARLES (SCALABRINIANS)**

*Consistory Hall
Saturday, 14 October 2023*

[[Multimedia](#)]

Dear brothers and sisters, welcome!

On Saturday morning, 14 October, the Holy Father received in audience participants in the International Symposium on Scalabrinian spirituality, whom he encouraged to continue their precious work for migrants and refugees. With the theme, “I will come to gather all nations”, the symposium “aims to delve into the spiritual legacy of St. John Baptist Scalabrini, to highlight the fundamental elements that constitute the spirituality of the Scalabrinian missionaries, to emphasize the intercultural dimension of spirituality, and to research the ways in which this spirituality can be expressed and shared”. The following is a translation of Pope Francis’ address, which he gave in Italian in the Vatican Apostolic Palace.

I greet you all and am pleased to meet you at the conclusion of the Conference on Scalabrinian Spirituality. You have reflected on the Biblical verse: “I will come to gather all nations” (*Is 66:18*), a theme that is very significant for your charism. Indeed, Saint John Baptist Scalabrini, who founded you as missionaries for migrants, taught you that when taking care of them, you should consider yourselves as brothers and sisters on a journey towards unity, according to the heartfelt words of Jesus’ priestly prayer (cf. *Jn 17:20-23*).

Let us be clear: migrating is not a pleasant pilgrimage in communion; it is often an ordeal. And, just as every person has the right to migrate, all the more so do they have the right to be able to stay in their own land and live there in peace and dignity. Yet the tragedy of forced migrations

caused by wars, famine, poverty and environmental hardship is there for all to see today. And this is precisely where your spirituality comes in: how do you prepare your heart for these brothers and sisters? With the support of which spiritual path?

Scalabrini helps us, precisely by looking to the missionaries of migrants as cooperators of the Holy Spirit for unity. His is an enlightened and original vision of the migratory phenomenon, viewed as a call to create communion in charity. While still a young parish priest, he recounts finding himself at Milan Central Station, in front of a mass of Italian migrants leaving for America. He mentions seeing “three or four hundred poorly clad persons, separated into different groups. On their faces [...] furrowed by premature wrinkles privation usually imprints, there transpired the tumult of affections that troubled their hearts at that moment. [...] They were emigrants [...]”. They were preparing to leave their homeland. (*L'emigrazione italiana in America*, 1888). These images are unfortunately familiar to us too. And the Saint, struck by that great misery, understood that there was a sign from God for him there: the call to assist those people materially and spiritually, so that none of them, left to themselves, would be lost, losing their faith; so that they could come, as the prophet Isaiah says, to the holy mountain of Jerusalem “from all the nations as an offering to the Lord, upon horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules, and upon dromedaries” (66:20). Horses, chariots, litters, mules and dromedaries, to which today we could add boats, trailer trucks and barely seaworthy vessels; but the destination remains the same, Jerusalem, the city of peace (cf. *Ps* 122:3-9), the Church, the home of all peoples (cf. *Is* 56:7), where the life of each is sacred and precious. Yes, for Scalabrini this Jerusalem is the Catholic, that is, universal, Church; and she is such because she is “mother”, because she is a city open to anyone seeking a home and a safe harbour.

And here is a first appeal to us, to cultivate hearts that are rich in catholicity, that yearn for universality and unity, for encounter and communion. It is the invitation to spread a mentality of closeness — “closeness”, this key word, is the style of God, who always draws near — a spirituality, a mindset of care and welcome, and to build, in the words of Saint Paul VI, “the civilization of love” in the world (*Homily for the solemn closing rite of the Holy Year*, 25 December 1975). However, it would be somewhat utopian to claim that all this can be achieved by human forces alone. Instead, it is a matter of cooperating with the action of the Spirit, and therefore of acting in history under the guidance and with the energy that comes from God: allowing ourselves to be conquered by his infinite tenderness to feel and act according to his ways, which are not always our ways (cf. *Is* 55:8), to recognize him in the stranger (cf. *Mt* 25:35) and to find in him the strength to love freely. The stranger. Let us not forget these three words from the Old Testament: the widow, the orphan, and the stranger. And this is an important thing in the Old Testament: the stranger.

And here is the second appeal that the Bishop Saint of Piacenza makes to us, when he insists on the need for the missionary to have a relationship of love with Jesus, the Son of God Incarnate, and to cultivate it especially through the Eucharist, celebrated and adored. I emphasize this word,

“adored”. I think we have lost the sense of adoration. And we have prayers to do something... beautiful prayers, but... in silence, adoring. The modern mentality has taken this sense of adoration away from us a little bit. Rediscover it, please, rediscover it.

We know how much Scalabrini loved Adoration, to which he devoted himself even at night, despite his tiredness from his exhausting work schedule, and which he did not renounce during the day, even in his busiest moments. He had no illusions: without prayer there is no mission! He said: “[Do not] allow yourselves to be led astray by a certain mad desire to help others, neglecting yourselves [...]. It is right that you make yourselves all things to all men; but [...] remember the Angels who in Jacob’s Ladder ascended to God and descended to earth [...]. For you, too, are Angels of the Lord” (*Final address to the Diocesan Synod of Piacenza*, 4 September 1879). To ascend to God is indispensable in order to then know how to descend to the ground, to be “angels from below”, close to the least: it is no coincidence that Jacob’s ladder (cf. *Gen 28:10-22*) is depicted right in the centre of Scalabrini’s episcopal coat of arms.

Therefore, dear sisters, dear brothers, here is an invitation to renew your commitment to migrants, and to root it increasingly in an intense spiritual life, following the example of your Founder. In addition to this however, I want to say *a very big thank you* for the great deal of work you do throughout the world! I have been a witness to this work ever since the days of Buenos Aires, and you do it so well. Thank you, thank you very much! Keep going, God bless you. And pray, pray also for me, because this “profession” is not easy!

[Hail Mary]

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