

World Migrant and Refugee Day Homily Sept. 24 – Marseille

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In today's reading, Saint Paul sends us a warning, a plea, that might sound like his final wish to the community of the Philippians: "Live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ!" (Phil 1:27a). As the Apostle approaches the ultimate purpose of his own life, this cry comes out from his heart. He is eager to make sure that his disciples will constantly refer back to the Gospel, in order to be worthy of the vocation to which they have been called, of the baptism that they have received, and to ensure their supreme joy.

In the Gospel, we find all the guidance we need in order to be disciples of Christ. And as we observe today the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, let us look at what this parable from everyday life teaches us about the "disturbing" reality of migratory phenomena, inviting us, as Pope Francis encouraged us yesterday at the conclusion of the Mediterranean Meetings, to "listen to life stories" of these people.

As was often the case in Jesus' time, a group of workers go to the town square and wait for a chance to be hired for the day. The owner of a vineyard, after reaching an agreement with the workers, sends them out to work on his land. The workers then set out for the vineyard, where the work awaits them.

Over the course of the day, the owner keeps returning to the square and each time hires a new group of workers, because he does not want them to sit around doing nothing. The different groups of workers come to the vineyard at different hours and as a result, they end up working different lengths of time. Yet, come pay time, the master orders that everyone be given the same wages, raising complaints from those who had started the workday earlier. The owner's response is rather categorical:

"Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? [...] I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?" (Mt 20:13-15).

The parable contains a twofold teaching. First, the Lord, the true Owner of the vineyard, is good and generous to those who have not had a chance to start working earlier in the day. As we prayed together in the responsorial psalm, "*Just* is the Lord in all his ways and *good* in all his works" (Ps. 144). Secondly, Jesus introduces an unsettling new logic, combining justice with solidarity and reversing the socially acceptable order of things. It is a logic that goes far beyond our ability to understand human relationships.

For today's workers, the journey to the vineyard is often far more arduous and perilous than for those in the parable. So-called "journeys of hope" entail all kinds of difficulties: pitfalls, exploitation, abuse, violence... And some people even lose their lives! Yet, even in the middle of the desert or amidst threatening waves, the importance of their goal gives them strength to keep

on going. Because all have in common the same hope: to be able to guarantee a dignified life for themselves and their families.

In the context of migration today, putting those who are last *first* means making some rather urgent commitments, both personally and collectively. First and foremost, we must commit ourselves to ensuring that the path to the "vineyard" is orderly and safe, guaranteeing that everyone's rights and dignity are respected. This requires knocking on doors, expanding regular migration channels, and the chance to become "full citizens".

That would replace the expensive and dangerous routes that countless people today regard as their only option. In addition, this would foster greater movement of migration flows, to the benefit of all.

Indeed, as Pope Francis pointed out yesterday, "the phenomenon of migration is not so much a momentary emergency, always good for generating alarmist propaganda, but a fact of our time, a process ... that must be governed with wise foresight".

We must learn from the parable in today's gospel to harmonize justice with solidarity, drawing on that spirit of fraternal sharing that transcends all borders. The sharing to which the Gospel calls us requires sacrifice, for we must limit what we take for ourselves so that everyone may have what they need, in the certainty that the Lord will never deprive us of what we truly need.

Pope Francis' Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees this year is dedicated to the freedom to choose to migrate or to stay. Starting from the sad fact that such freedom is not often guaranteed, the Holy Father highlights the urgency of a shared commitment, so that everyone is assured a "vineyard" in which to work with dignity in their country of origin, without being forced to migrate.

Migration, which is destined to continue over time, helps to build many "multi-coloured vineyards", multicultural societies where diversity becomes an opportunity for everyone to be enriched. Regrettably, prejudices and fears prevent us from seizing this opportunity, generating marginalization and exclusion. We must respond to a culture that rejects others with a culture of encounter, source of joy.

Faced with all these challenges, Christian communities are called upon to set a good example, through "this scandalously evangelical way of life", which the Holy Father encouraged yesterday. So yes, let us respond to the call launched by Saint Paul to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth: let us live, therefore, in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ!