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NO PERSON SHOULD END UP ON THE SCRAP HEAP OF HISTORY

HOMILY BY BISHOP JOSEPH GALEA-CURMI ON MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES DAY

At the heart of the Church in Malta's vast mission for the respect of the dignity of the whole person, the work with migrants and refugees surely stands out. This service which has always been conducted in silence, has lasted for nearly 70 years when the Malta Emigrants Commission. I also would like to mention other entities in the Church that operate with such dedication in this field such as the Jesuit Refugee Service, the Laboratory of Peace and other volunteers. Such work is priceless and essential, because it truly reflects what the Church strives to be in her defence of the vulnerable and those in distress.

Today we are celebrating the World Day of Migrants and Refugees. Pope Francis' message for this day eloquently describes the inspiration that motivates so many people involve themselves in this field. Today I would like to convey to you the core of this message.

Emblems of exclusion

The Pope says that at the heart of the "globalisation of indifference" that exists nowadays, "migrants, refugees, displaced persons and victims of trafficking have become emblems of exclusion." In addition to the hardships that their condition entails, they are often looked down upon and considered the source of all society's ills. This attitude is an alarm bell warning of the moral decline we will face if we continue to give ground to the throw-away culture.

Overcoming our fears

The manner in which history has developed in recent years has laid bare our fears. We tend to fear those whom we do not know, to fear what they could become and be afraid of their proximity to us. This is the reason behind our fear when refugees knock on our door in search of shelter and security for a better future. But the problem is not that we have doubts and fears. The problem is when they condition our way of thinking and acting to the point of making us intolerant, closed and perhaps even racist. Such an outlook is mirrored in our words, comments and general attitude. This was clearly articulated by the Diocesan Synod of Malta sixteen years ago in a message to us Maltese: "Racism is a structure of sin that is in contradiction with the belief that we are

all created equal in the Creator's image." (*Diakonia and Justice*, 21). We are all made in the image of God, irrespective of colour and race.

Growing in our humanity

Compassion and love towards the vulnerable reveals who we truly are, our true humanity. In the words of Pope Francis, compassion strikes the most sensitive chords of our humanity, releasing a vibrant urge to "be a neighbour" to all those whom we see in difficulty. As Jesus himself teaches us, being compassionate means recognizing the suffering of the other and taking immediate action to soothe, heal and save. Opening ourselves to others does not lead to impoverishment, but rather it enriches us and increases our humanity.

The most vulnerable pay the highest price

We must work together so that no one is excluded in a world that is sometime elitist and cruel with the emarginated. Pope Francis explains that those who pay the price are always the little ones, the poor, the most vulnerable, those that like Lazarus, as we have seen in the Gospel proclaimed today, are prevented from sitting at the table and are left with the "crumbs" of the banquet (cf. Lk 16:19-21). No person should end up on the scrap heap of history. Progress that creates exclusion makes the rich even richer and the poor even poorer. Progress that respects the dignity of the person seeks inclusion that looks forward to future generations.

We should not censor the words of Jesus

Jesus himself said, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" and "Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me." Jesus said these words after he had explained what it means to help people in need and presented us with a long list that includes "I was a stranger and you welcomed me". My appeal today is that we do not censor the words of Jesus by speaking and living as if he never uttered these words.

Jesus Christ asks us not to yield to the prevalent logic of the world, which justifies injustice to others for my own gain or that of my group. "Me first, and then the others if anything is left over!" Jesus asks us to strive to overcome this indifference towards our neighbours which leads to viewing them in purely economic terms that leads to their exploitation.

Persons at the centre

Pope Francis reminds us, "In every political activity, in every programme, in every pastoral action we must always put the person at the centre, in his or her many aspects, including the spiritual dimension. And this applies to all people, whose fundamental equality must be recognized. Consequently, "development cannot be

restricted to economic growth alone. To be authentic, it must be well-rounded; it must foster the development of each man and of the whole man”.

Migrants, especially those who are most vulnerable, help us to read the “signs of the times”. Through them, the Lord is calling us to conversion, to be set free from exclusivity, indifference and the throw-away culture. Through them, the Lord invites us to embrace fully our Christian life and to contribute, each according to his or her proper vocation, to the building up of a world that is more and more in accord with God’s plan.

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