



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Saint Peter's Square
Wednesday, 28 August 2024

[Multimedia]

The following text includes parts that were not read out loud, but should be considered as such.

Catechesis. Sea and desert.

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Today, I will postpone the usual catechesis and I would like to pause with you to think about the people who — even at this moment — are crossing seas and deserts to reach a land where they can live in peace and safety.

Sea and *desert* : these two words reappear in many testimonies I receive, both from migrants, and from people who are engaged in coming to their aid. And when I say “sea”, in the context of migrations, I also mean ocean, lake, river, all the insidious bodies of water that so many brothers and sisters all over the world are forced to cross to reach their destination. And “desert” is not only that of sand and dunes, or rocks, but also those inaccessible and dangerous territories, such as forests, jungles, steppes where migrants walk alone, left to their own devices. Migrants, sea and desert. Today’s migratory routes are often marked by crossings of seas and deserts, which for many, too many people — too many! — are deadly. Therefore, today I want to dwell on this tragedy, this pain. Some of these routes we know well, because they are often in the spotlight;

others, the majority, are little known, but no less travelled.

I have spoken about the Mediterranean many times, because I am the Bishop of Rome and because it is emblematic: the *mare nostrum*, a place of communication between peoples and civilizations, has become a cemetery. And the tragedy is that many, the majority of these deaths, could have been prevented. It must be said clearly: there are those who work systematically and with every means possible to repel migrants — to repel migrants. And this, when done with awareness and responsibility, is a grave sin. Let us not forget what the Bible says: “You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him” (Ex 22:21). The orphan, the widow and the stranger are the quintessential poor whom God always defends and asks to be defended.

Some deserts too, unfortunately, are becoming cemeteries of migrants. And even here it is not always a matter of “natural” deaths. No. At times, they have been taken to the desert and abandoned. We all know the photograph of Pato’s wife and daughter, who died of hunger and thirst in the desert. In the time of satellites and drones, there are migrant men, women and children that no one must see: they are hidden. Only God sees them and hears their cry. And this is a cruelty of our civilization.

Indeed, the sea and the desert are also biblical places, loaded with symbolic value. They are very important settings in the history of the exodus, the great migration of the people led by God through Moses from Egypt to the Promised Land. These places witness the tragedy of the people fleeing oppression and slavery. They are places of suffering, fear and desperation, but at the same time they are places of passage for liberation — and how many people cross the seas and the deserts to free themselves, today. They are places of passage for redemption, to reach freedom and the fulfilment of God’s promises (cf. [*Message for World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2024*](#)).

There is a Psalm which, addressing the Lord, says: “Thy way was through the sea / thy path through the great waters” (77:19). And another says that he “led his people through the wilderness, / for his steadfast love endures for ever” (136:16). These blessed words tell us that, to accompany the people on the journey to freedom, God himself crosses the sea and the desert; God does not remain at a distance, no; he shares in the migrants’ tragedy. God is there with them, with the migrants, he suffers with them, with the migrants. He weeps and hopes with them, with the migrants. It will be good for us today to think: the Lord is with our migrants in the *mare nostrum*, the Lord is with them, not with those who repel them.

Brothers and sisters, we can all agree on one thing: migrants should not be in those lethal seas and deserts. Today’s migrants should not be there — and they are, unfortunately. But it is not through more restrictive laws, it is not with the militarization of borders, it is not with rejection that we will obtain this result. Instead, we will obtain it by extending safe and legal access routes for migrants, providing refuge for those who flee from war, violence, persecution and various disasters; we will obtain it by promoting in every way a global governance of migration based on

justice, brotherhood and solidarity; and by joining forces to combat human trafficking, to stop the criminal traffickers who mercilessly exploit others' misery.

Dear brothers and sisters, think about the many tragedies of migrants — how many die in the Mediterranean. Think of Lampedusa, of Crotone... how many ugly and sad things. I wish to conclude by acknowledging and praising the commitment of the many good Samaritans who do their utmost to rescue and save injured and abandoned migrants on the routes of desperate hope, in the five continents. These courageous men and women are a sign of a humanity that does not allow itself to be contaminated by the malign culture of indifference and rejection — it is our indifference and that attitude of rejection that kills migrants. And those who cannot stay with them “on the front line” — I think of the many good people who are there on the front line, with “Mediterranea Saving Humans” [see page 16] and so many other associations — are not therefore excluded from this fight for civilization. We cannot be on the front line, but we are not excluded; there are many ways to make a contribution, first and foremost prayer. And I ask you: do you pray for migrants, for those who come to our lands to save their lives? And then “you” want to send them away...

Dear brothers and sisters, let us join our hearts and forces, so that the seas and deserts are not cemeteries, but spaces where God may open up roads to freedom and fraternity.

Special Greetings

I extend a warm welcome to the English-speaking pilgrims taking part in today's Audience, especially the group of students and teachers from Norway. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. May God bless you!

Let us think of countries at war, so many countries at war. Let us think of Palestine, Israel, martyred Ukraine, let us think of Myanmar, North Kivu and many countries at war. May the Lord give them the gift of peace.

Lastly, my thoughts go out to *young people*, to *the sick*, to *the elderly* and to *newlyweds*. Imitating Saint Augustine, whose liturgical memory we celebrate today, be thirsty for true wisdom and tirelessly seek the Lord, the living source of eternal love.

I give all of you my blessing!

Summary of the Holy Father's words

Dear brothers and sisters: In this Audience, I invite you to join me in thinking of and praying for our brothers and sisters who even now seek to escape war, violence, persecution and disasters and set out in search of a land where they can live in peace and security. Many of these migrants, including young children, suffer greatly and die along the way. Most of these tragedies could be prevented. The teaching of Scripture is clear: God especially loves his children who are poor and in need, and we are called to help and defend them. Rather than more restrictive laws and the militarization of borders, what is needed is an expansion of secure and regular means of access, and a global governance of migrations based on justice, fraternity and solidarity. May we not turn a blind eye to these brothers and sisters, support those who seek to assist them and, above all, pray fervently for just solutions to this grave humanitarian crisis.