



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE ASSEMBLY
OF THE COUNCIL OF THE INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC
MIGRATION COMMISSION (ICMC)**

Monday, 12 November 2001

Dear Friends in Christ,

1. I am happy to welcome you, members of the Council of the *International Catholic Migration Commission*, on the occasion of your Assembly. Your presence here is especially significant, after the tragic events of 11 September forced the cancellation of your meeting in New York; it shows your determination to pursue your vital work in the face of every setback. I thank Professor Zamagni for his kind words, and I extend a special greeting to the representatives of *Migrantes*, your partners in the Italian Episcopal Conference. I greet as well the Commission's benefactors, whose contribution is especially important at a time when you are seeking to reduce dependence upon public funding, so that the Commission can operate always as an independent Catholic agency.

2. This year you celebrate your Fiftieth Anniversary, and that is cause for thanksgiving. At the inauguration of the Commission, the future Pope Paul VI declared that its cause was the cause of Christ himself. In these decades, the Commission has not ceased to show to migrant people the face of the Son of Man who himself had "nowhere to lay his head" (*Lk 9:58*).

In the time since your foundation, patterns of human migration have changed, but the phenomenon is no less dramatic, and your work grows more urgent as the problem of refugees grows ever more acute. Indeed, now is the time for still more generous and effective forms of service in the field of human migration, helping to ensure that people already *marginalized* will not be further *penalized* because they are not a part of the process of economic globalization. Today, therefore, I wish to invite you to an ever deeper awareness of your mission: to see Christ in every

brother and sister in need, to proclaim and defend the dignity of every migrant, every displaced person and every refugee. In this way, assistance given will not be considered an alms from the goodness of our heart, but an act of justice due to them.

3. We live in a world in which peoples and cultures are being drawn into ever closer and more complex interaction. Yet paradoxically we see greater ethnic, cultural and religious tensions, which severely affect migrants and refugees, who are especially vulnerable to the prejudice and injustice which often accompany these tensions. That is why the Commission's advocacy with governments and international organizations and its promotion of laws and policies to protect the defenceless are especially important aspects of its mission. It is also the reason why it is necessary to continue developing training programmes for your personnel, to help them to deepen their understanding of the realities of forced migration and the possibilities for assisting uprooted families and promoting mutual respect among people of different cultures.

4. Your service is bound by a two-fold fidelity: to Christ, the one mediator who is the Way, the Truth and the Life for the whole human family; and to the Church, which he established as the universal sacrament of salvation. The soul of your work is a vision of human dignity which is based upon the truth of the human person created in the image of God (cf. *Gen 1:26*), a truth which illumines the entire Social Teaching of the Church. From this vision there flows a sense of inalienable rights which do not depend on any human power to concede or deny, for they are rights which have their source in God. This is a profoundly religious vision which is shared not only by other Christians, but also by many followers of the other great religions of the world. That is why the work of the Commission has been such a fruitful point of ecumenical and interreligious cooperation; and this too is a precious achievement in a troubled and divided world. I urge you, therefore, as a Catholic International Organization united with the Holy See in the great task of promoting solidarity, never to grow weary in the search for new modes of ecumenical and interreligious cooperation, which are needed now more than ever.

Remembering you in my prayers, and entrusting the Commission's work to the loving protection of Mary, Mother of the Church, I cordially invoke upon you abundant grace and peace in Jesus Christ, "the faithful witness and firstborn from the dead" (*Rev 1:5*).

5. Today representatives and members of the *Migrantes* Foundation have joined the International Catholic Commission for Migration and I cordially greet them. This year this organism, which works for the Italian Episcopal Conference, is celebrating the 50th anniversary of its establishment.

Set up for the evangelization and pastoral service of Italians abroad, the Foundation is now dedicated to supporting Italian ecclesial structures for the human and spiritual care of emigrants who arrive in Italy. Encouraging dialogue among the cultures for a civilization of love and peace, it is called to spread understanding and appreciation of all who arrive in the peninsula, in an

atmosphere of peaceful coexistence, respectful of the rights of the human person.

Through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, I hope that this praiseworthy institution may continue to carry on its precious work according to the spirit of Christ. My blessing to you all.

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