

BIBLICAL HOMILY

THEME: 'Even one of these children'

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Every year, for over a century, the Church has celebrated the World Day of Migrants and Refugees. The theme chosen by Pope Leo XIV for this 112th World Day of Migrants and Refugees (WDMR) is deeply thought-provoking: 'Even one of these little ones.' This Word of God points us to the Gospel of Matthew 18:5: 'And whoever welcomes even one child like this in my name welcomes me'.

Here lies a challenge and an appeal that is addressed to us in a global context troubled by real insecurity. We experience human fragility at every level. We are called upon to act for the sake of the little ones, yet we too are also vulnerable people who await God's consolation.

1. Jesus, this little one to be welcomed among us despite the new challenges posed by the reality of migration today

Jesus has always shown us the path that he himself first walked. When he invites us to welcome the little ones, he invites us to welcome his very self: he who became small, a migrant, a refugee, poor and destitute, to 'enrich us through His poverty' (2 Cor. 8:9). Jesus himself is the poor little one knocking at our door, seeking to be welcomed (cf. The Flight into Egypt, Mt. 2:13–15).

And Jesus goes on to add these most important words: 'Whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me' (Lk 9:48). Whoever welcomes the Lord Jesus receives the strength to welcome those whom He chooses as His beloved friends: children, the poor, and the most vulnerable, including migrants and refugees. The sure path that leads to God passes by way of caring for the little ones. Welcoming them is a necessary path towards God, who became one of us in Jesus. In this way, God opens up for us the path of spiritual childhood lived out in faith, nourished by hope, and made tangible through closeness to the little ones and those who are least in the eyes of the world.

2. Why is it urgent to welcome Jesus? 'The poor cry out, and the Lord hears them' (Ps 34 [33])

As Holy Scripture reminds us, 'The Lord's love has not come to an end, his compassion is not exhausted; it is renewed every morning' (Lam. 3:22–23).

God remains ever faithful; he never ceases to love his children. His mercy is not exhausted by our weaknesses, our sufferings, or our mistakes. Every new day is a grace that offers us the chance to start afresh with new hope. God walks with us, consoles us, and helps us to rise again in the face of our difficulties. (Ex. 3:7–8). These words also invite us, following God's example, to become witnesses to his compassion towards our brothers and sisters, especially the most vulnerable.

Let us open our eyes to see the suffering of the young migrants who cry out in anguish; above all, let us come to their aid. Let us care for all those living on the margins of society, including migrants and refugees, for 'whatever you did to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me' (Mt 25:40).

3. What challenges must we be mindful of?

The Word of God teaches us that evil is not a new reality. From the very first pages of Scripture, violence enters the human heart and causes suffering. 'The earth was corrupt before God and full of violence' (Gen. 6:11). Still today we live in a world of violence, and children are its first victims. Their cry rises up to God, like the cry of the people who lived in oppression in Egypt: 'I have seen the misery of my people in Egypt and have heard their cry' (Ex. 3:7). God does not remain indifferent to the tears of the little ones.

We also live in a world that flaunts power. Yet Sacred Scripture shows us that power, when not lived out as service, becomes oppression. Pharaoh oppressed Israel (Ex. 1:8–14); King Herod, to preserve his throne, ordered the massacre of the innocents (Mt. 2:16–18). Jesus himself, while still a child, had to flee to Egypt with Mary and Joseph (Mt. 2:13–15). He personally shared the plight of migrant and refugee children. For this reason, today's children on the move are the first victims of every form of power that seeks to humiliate, exclude, and force them to flee.

Their journey is fraught with physical dangers. They cross the sea, traverse the desert, and endure cold and hunger in their search of a safe and better life. The Bible is well acquainted with this experience. The people of Israel journeyed through the desert amidst trials, hunger, and thirst (Ex. 16:2–3; Deut. 8:2–4), and the Lord walked alongside his people. The psalmist also proclaims: 'In my distress I cried out to the Lord, and he answered me' (Ps. 120:1). How many children today are travelling paths of suffering, waiting for someone to hear their cry!

The thirst for wealth and power continues to generate wars and divisions. The Apostle James asks: 'Where do wars and fights come from amongst you? Do they not come from your passions?' (James 4:1–2). The prophets strongly denounce those who oppress the weak: 'Woe to those who pass unjust decrees... to deny

justice to the poor' (Isaiah 10:1–2); 'They have sold the righteous for silver and the poor for a pair of sandals' (Amos 2:6). In this context, many children fall into the hands of traffickers, suffering from human trafficking, violence, and severe forms of exploitation, because their vulnerability is turned into an opportunity for profit. But God hears their cry and will call everyone to account for every injustice (Wis. 6:1–8; Prov. 31:8–9).

Due to the lack of a stable homeland, many children wander in search of survival. Their story recalls that of Abraham, called to leave his own land (Gen. 12:1), as well as that of the people of Israel journeying through the desert (Deut. 26:5–9) and that of the Holy Family forced into exile (Mt. 2:13–15). Young people forced to migrate carry invisible wounds in their hearts: the trauma of separation, the loss of their points of reference, a longing for their origins, and a lack of even the bare necessities. Yet the Lord remains faithful: 'The Lord protects the stranger; he upholds the orphan and the widow' (Ps. 146:9).

Faced with this reality, Sacred Scripture does not allow us to remain mere spectators. The Lord commands his people: 'You shall therefore love the stranger, for you yourselves were strangers in the land of Egypt' (Deut. 10:19); 'You shall not mistreat the stranger or oppress him, for you yourselves were strangers in the land of Egypt' (Ex. 22:20); 'You shall treat the stranger who resides among you as one born among you; you shall love him as yourself' (Lev. 19:34). Restoring these children's humanity means recognising the dignity that God has imprinted on each of them from the very beginning of creation (Gen. 1:26–27), leaving no one out. This is why Jesus identifies himself with the little ones: 'Whoever welcomes a child like this in my name welcomes me' (Mt. 18:5); 'I was a stranger and you welcomed me' (Mt. 25:35). Welcoming a migrant child is not merely an act of solidarity: it is an encounter with Christ himself, present in the face of the little one, the poor, and the stranger.

4. Urgent and effective responses to the phenomenon of migration, a serious threat to the rights and dignity of children and the young

The parable of the Good Samaritan teaches us that our neighbour is anyone in need of our help, regardless of nationality, religion, or origin, and irrespective of the socio-economic or ethnic group to which they belong. Just as the Good Samaritan stopped, cared for the wounded man, and offered him concrete help, so too we are called to care for migrants today, especially children and the most vulnerable. They are often fleeing war, poverty, and persecution, and risk having their rights and dignity violated. Jesus calls on us not to 'pass by' as the priest and the Levite did, but to respond with compassion, solidarity, and effective action that ensures a warm welcome, protection, and respect for the person. Jesus' final

command, **‘Go and do likewise,’** reminds us that love for our neighbour is shown through concrete acts in solidarity with those in need (cf. Lk. 10:29–37).

We cannot remain unmoved, letting our hearts become numb, in the face of the misery of so many innocent people. We cannot help but weep. We cannot help but respond. Let us ask the Lord for the grace to weep, to shed tears that will convert our hearts.

5. The Church’s concern for migrant children reminds us of our duty to welcome, as the Gospel teaches

The Church’s concern for migrant youth does not stem solely from humanitarian concern, but is rooted in the mystery of the Incarnation. In Jesus Christ, God drew near to every person, especially the youngest and most vulnerable. This is why the Lord says: ‘Whoever welcomes a child like this in my name welcomes me’ (Mt. 18:5). Children who experience migration are not merely the recipients of our solidarity, but the very face of Christ asking to be welcomed.

In the light of the Gospel, welcoming a migrant child means recognising their dignity as a child of God, created in his image (Gen 1:27).

I invite you to look upon every child and young person through the eyes of God, who ‘examines the heart’ (1 Sam. 16:7), and not to allow anyone to be excluded from the Church’s loving embrace. I ask you to defend the youngest among us from violence, trafficking and every form of exploitation, bearing in mind the exhortation of the Word of God: ‘Open your mouth on behalf of those who have no voice’ (Prov. 31).

I urge you to accompany them with the compassion of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:33–35), offering them closeness, comfort, and hope (2 Cor. 1:3–4). I also encourage you to build communities where every child can feel welcomed as a child of God and a brother or sister to all (Gal. 3:26–28), transforming every act of charity into a seed of the Kingdom, destined to bear fruit (Mk. 4:30–32).

I entrust this mission to the whole Church: caring for migrant children and young people on the move means making Christ’s love visible and bearing witness to the Gospel through our lives.

6. Conclusion

Let us not forget that we too are ‘strangers and pilgrims on earth’ (Heb. 11:13), for ‘our citizenship is in heaven’ (Phil. 3:20). This fundamental truth of who we are makes us humbler and more fraternal towards those who are seeking a home,

peace, and hope. By welcoming migrant and refugee children and youth, we become witnesses to God's love and help to build an ever more fraternal Church, where no one is regarded as a stranger, for 'you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God' (Eph. 2:19).

Let us ask the Lord to grant us a new heart (Ezek. 36:26): a heart that sees with mercy, listens attentively, welcomes with joy, protects with love, and serves with humility. In this way, we shall be recognised as true disciples of Christ, for 'by this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another' (Jn 13:35).

Finally, let us entrust all migrants, refugees, and their families to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who, together with Saint Joseph, lovingly cared for the Child Jesus and faced life's trials with faith and hope. May she accompany those who live far from their homeland and help us to be 'peacemakers' (Mt 5:9), so that the Church may always be a sign of Christ's presence and a reflection of his merciful love in the world.

Amen.