

PASTORAL HOMILY

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ,

Today, as the Church celebrates the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, the Word of the Lord speaks to us with disarming simplicity: ‘Whoever welcomes even one of these little ones in my name welcomes me’ (Mt. 18:5).

Jesus does not say, ‘whoever welcomes many,’ but ‘even just one of these little ones.’ This means that, for God, every person counts. Every face has infinite value. Every child, every migrant, every refugee is known and loved by the Father.

In a world in which the sheer number of migrants can sometimes make us forget the value of the individual human person, Jesus invites us to see things in a new light: behind every statistic there is a story, a face, a family, and suffering, but also hope. Therefore, the migrant, the refugee, is neither a category nor a number, but a *life*.

Pope Leo reminds us that migrants are neither numbers nor files, but ‘people who have left behind families and homes,’ with ‘dreams that no one has the right to despise’ (Pope Leo XIV, *Address to Organisations working with Migrants, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria*, 11 June 2026). Indeed, human dignity has no passport, nor does it lose its value when it crosses a border.

1. To welcome the little one is to welcome Jesus himself

Brothers and sisters, when Jesus says, ‘*Whoever welcomes even one of these little ones in my name welcomes me*’ (Mt. 18:5), he reveals a truth that profoundly challenges the way we live out the Gospel. He identifies with the little ones, with those who are most vulnerable and most in need of love, protection, and hope.

The Son of God chose to share our human condition from the very beginning of his life. By becoming a child, he chose to enter into our world in simplicity and weakness,

showing that God's greatness is revealed in humility and love. For this reason, every child possesses a dignity that no one can take away, for each child loved by God and called to be a sign of his loving presence.

These words of our Lord take on an even greater significance when we think of migrant and refugee children. They are not merely people in need of our help: they are brothers and sisters entrusted to our care. In their fears, their hopes, and their vulnerability, Christ continues to knock at the door of our hearts.

To welcome children, to listen to them, to protect them, and to restore their hope means welcoming Jesus himself. This is the criterion by which the Lord invites us to measure the authenticity of our faith: not by the words we speak, but by the concrete love we show to little ones. Pope Leo XIV says that their presence must therefore be recognised and appreciated as a true divine blessing, an opportunity to open ourselves to the grace of God, which gives new energy and hope to his Church: 'Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some have, without realising it, welcomed angels' (Heb. 13:2; cf. Pope Leo XIV, *Message for the 111th World Day of Migrants and Refugees*, 4–5 October 2025).

The Church never ceases to remind us that Christian charity is not merely external aid offered to someone who is suffering; it is an encounter with a person who is loved by God (cf. Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 34). To welcome a child or any other vulnerable or migrant person with love is to become an instrument of God's tenderness.

2. Looking upon the little ones with God's merciful gaze

Brothers and sisters, having invited us to welcome little ones in his name, the Lord also teaches us to look upon them through his eyes. God's gaze does not stop at appearances, nor at the social conditions or the wounds that mark a person's life. God sees, first and foremost, a beloved child, created in his image and worthy of his love.

On this World Day of Migrants and Refugees, we are called to purify our gaze. When faced with children who are forced to leave their homeland, we cannot focus solely on the difficulties of migration or the challenges it entails. Our faith in Jesus Christ invites us to recognise in every child a person with inviolable dignity, a story to be heard, and a hope to be cherished.

To look with God's merciful gaze means allowing ourselves to be moved by the suffering of these little ones without succumbing to indifference. It means learning to see beyond the wounds, recognising the gifts, riches, and possibilities that the Lord has placed in their lives. It is a gaze that does not judge, exclude, or condemn, but encourages, supports, and opens up paths of hope.

3. Migrant children: A responsibility entrusted to our love

Among those who experience migration, children bear a particular burden, for they often face situations marked by war, poverty, violence, and other hardships that affect their lives.

They sometimes bear visible wounds, but the most painful wounds are those hidden from view: the fear of death and the unknown; deep-seated trauma; the loss of one's home and familiar points of reference; a lack of affection, security, and belonging; separation from their families; unbearable poverty; and uncertainty about the future. For these reasons and more, our families, schools, parishes, and religious communities are called to be places of welcome where these children can rediscover security, dignity, and support.

4. A Church that welcomes, protects, promotes, and integrates

Faced with the challenges of migration, we join with the whole Church in pursuing the following four pathways in support of young migrants. As Pope Francis reminded us, these four practices help us to commit ourselves in concrete terms (cf. Pope Francis, *Message for the 104th World Day of Migrants and Refugees*, 14 January 2018):

a. Welcome

We are asked to open our hearts and our communities to young migrants. This means following God's example, and making room for others, so that every child and every vulnerable person may find an open door and hear the words: 'You have a place among us.'

b. Protect

Like Jesus himself, we are called to defend the dignity of vulnerable persons, especially children, against all forms of exploitation and violence. The Lord said, 'Let the children come to me... for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs' (Mt. 19:13–14).

c. Promote

As Christians, it is our duty to help each of these little ones to develop the gifts that God has entrusted to them through education, formation, and guidance.

The potential of a child lies not, first and foremost, in what they receive, but what they are capable of achieving.

d. Integrate

We are builders of a community of communion in which every human person, including the youngest and most vulnerable, can contribute their own richness, culture, and experience.

This is the path of personal conversion in the face of the complex waves of migration that show no sign of abating. We cannot close our hearts to Christ who knocks at our doors.

But is our community truly a home that is open to others? Are our hearts open to welcoming Christ who comes even to disturb us in the person of the young migrant, of the vulnerable person who cries out?

5. Welcoming migrants: A witness to the Gospel

The Second Vatican Council teaches us that the Church is called to be ‘a sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of the whole human race’ (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 1).

Thus, the Church does not welcome migrants out of mere human solidarity, but because she recognises in them the presence of the Lord. This means that every parish, every Christian family, every religious community must become a place where no one feels rejected.

Pope Paul VI said that the world listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers (cf. Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 41).

In this light, our welcome thus becomes a silent yet tangible proclamation of the Gospel. When we welcome a child, when we protect a vulnerable person, when we share with those in need, we proclaim that God is our Father and that he cares for all his children.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, Jesus’ words today are clear: ‘Whoever welcomes even one of these little ones in my name welcomes me’ (Mt. 18:5).

Though we cannot alleviate all the suffering of migrants, we can at least bear witness to our love for them. The Lord asks us never to refuse love to that little hand which is held out before us, for in every suffering child is found the face of Christ.

Jesus asks us for:

A smile to restore hope.

An outstretched hand to lift up a life that is bowed down.

An open door to foster encounter.

We ask you, Lord, for a heart like yours: a heart that sees, that listens, that welcomes, that protects; in short, a heart that loves.

Make all migrants and those who welcome them witnesses of fraternity and hope.

Virgin Mary, you who experienced exile with Saint Joseph and the Child Jesus, accompany all migrant and refugee children and take care of each one of them, as only a good Mother knows how.

Amen.

