



Homily by Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor – May Day for Migrants

Homily by Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor at a Mass concelebrated on 1 May at Westminster Cathedral by the three bishops of the London Catholic Dioceses on the Feast of St Joseph the Worker as part of the 'May Day for Migrants' organised by the three Dioceses in collaboration with London Citizens.

Dear friends in Jesus Christ,

I want especially to welcome all the migrant workers and their families here today, who have come from other countries in search of work and new life here in London . We hope that this Mass will communicate to you that, as far as the Catholic Church is concerned, you are Londoners. We want you to feel welcome in our parishes and our schools and our ethnic chaplaincies. We want you to know that you belong.

For in the Catholic Church no one is a stranger; and the Church is not foreign to anyone, anywhere. The Church is "God's family on earth", as Pope Benedict said recently in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* ; and in God, as we know, there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free; we are all children of the same Father, and while we celebrate and respect our different cultures, we share a common baptism and a common dignity.

It is our earnest hope that during your time here in London , you are made aware of this by the hospitality and the welcome you receive from our parishes and schools. We stand in solidarity with you. We commit ourselves to your pastoral care and to work towards removing obstacles to you exercising your dignity and living as children of God.

Today is the Feast of St Joseph the Worker. Jesus, the Son of God, dedicated himself for many years to manual labour, so that he was known as the "carpenter's son" (Mt 13:55). The Church has always taught the dignity of work. Work is of fundamental importance to human fulfilment. Yet for the same reason, by virtue of the value it retains in the divine plan, work must be carried out with full respect for human dignity, and must serve the common good. But work should not be idolised, and people should not be enslaved by it; if work is necessary, so too is rest. Rest from work gives time for families to build relationships, and for people to serve their communities; and that is why the right to holidays such as this Bank Holiday, and the need to limit commercial activity on Sunday, are essential.

It is a fact that migration can mean enormous hardships and suffering for the migrants. As we know, it has been encouraged and promoted in recent times to foster the economic development of both the migrants' host country and their country of origin. Many nations would not be what they are today without the contribution made by millions of immigrants. But we should never forget that the migration of families, and women in particular, are marked by suffering. Sometimes immigrants are deprived of their most elementary human rights. It is very necessary to reiterate that foreign migrants are not to be considered merchandise or merely manpower. They should not be treated just like any other factor of production. Every migrant enjoys inalienable fundamental rights which must be respected in all cases. Furthermore, the migrants' contribution to the economy of the host country comes together with the possibility of them to use their intelligence

and abilities in their work.

This is especially true of undocumented workers, who have entered the country illegally. The Church has long taught that to migrate is a right, just as nations have a right to regulate immigration. The needs of immigrants must be measured against the needs of the receiving countries, and that the rights of these nations must not be exaggerated to the point of denying access to needy people from other countries. The Church does not approve of illegal immigration, which makes people vulnerable to exploitation by people traffickers and divides families. But nor can the Church ignore the plight among us of those who are here without legal status, neither contributing through taxes nor benefitting from rights. We stand in solidarity with you too. The Church, said Pope John Paul II in his migration day message, “is the place where illegal immigrants are also recognised and welcomed as brothers and sisters”.

Nor can the Church ignore that, while our nation benefits economically from the presence of undocumented workers, too often we turn a blind eye when they are exploited by employers. Illegal migrants should not be treated as criminals; no one leaves their country in search of work in another country unless they are desperate to do so. The presence in our city of hundreds of thousands of undocumented workers creates social misery all of its own. Working in the dark, they are more vulnerable to exploitation, while undercutting other wage earners. Some are forced to repay extortionate sums to people traffickers, in a modern version of slavery. Is it not time to consider, as other countries have done, ways of regularising their situation – those who are working in the country and do not have a criminal record - to the benefit of our economy and to enable them to play a fuller part in society?

Dear friends, the face of London is changing and with it, our Church. Our capital is at the crossroads of the greatest movement of people in history. We glimpse the future of our society and our Church in the amazing diversity of cultures and languages in our three Dioceses.

In migrants, the Church has always contemplated the image of Christ who said, “I was a stranger and you made me welcome” (Mt 25:35). Their condition is, therefore, a challenge to the faith and love of believers who are called on to heal the evils caused by migration and discover the plan God pursues through migration even when there are obvious injustices. God’s appeal, made so forcefully in both the Old and the New Testaments, is for fraternity – for there to be new bonds of friendship forged between newcomer and native.

It is one of the central tasks of Christians – a constant theme of the Old and New Testaments - to offer hospitality to the exile and the stranger, seeing in him and her the face of Christ. Faith in the presence of Christ in the migrant leads to a conversion of mind and heart, which leads to a renewed spirit of communion. We, the three bishops of London, want to invite our parishioners to become aware and conscious of the strangers in our midst, and to commit ourselves to them. The people we stand alongside in the pews need us also to stand alongside them in their search for dignity and justice and a better, more dignified life.

In short: We are happy that you are here. We are grateful for the vital role that you play in our economy. We want you to play as full a role as possible in the life of our Church. We want our Catholic people to see in you the face of Christ. We want you to be welcomed such that you are strangers no longer. Your work is precious, as your lives are precious. And though you may be far from your homes, we want you to know that here, in the Church in London, you have a home.