



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
ON THE OCCASION OF THE FIFTH WORLD CONGRESS
OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PASTORAL CARE
OF MIGRANTS AND ITINERANT PEOPLE**

Thursday, 20 November 2003

*Your Eminences,
Dear Brother Bishops,
Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,*

1. Peace be with you! It is with joy that I welcome you here today. I extend a special greeting to the President of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, Cardinal Stephen Fumio Hamao, and I thank him for the kind words addressed to me on your behalf. I am glad to greet the other Cardinals and the Bishops present among you, and to offer a particular welcome to our brothers and sisters from other Christian communities. On this occasion of your Fifth World Congress I also assure you of my spiritual closeness to the migrants, refugees, displaced persons and foreign students throughout the world whom you seek to assist.

The work of promoting the well-being of the many men and women who for various reasons do not live in their homelands represents a vast field for the new evangelization to which the whole Church is called. An important condition of this task is to recognize the mobility – voluntary and involuntary – of so many families today.

2. The Church continues to seek to respond to the signs of the times; a challenge which always calls for renewed pastoral commitment. Inspired by Pope Pius XII's Apostolic Constitution *Exsul Familia* and in response to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, the Pontifical Council is currently preparing an Instruction that will address the new spiritual and pastoral needs of migrants and refugees, and present the phenomenon of migration as a way of fostering dialogue, peace and the proclamation of the Gospel.

Special attention needs to be given today to the ecumenical aspect of migration, with reference to Christians not in full communion with the Catholic Church, and likewise to the interreligious dimension, with particular regard to the followers of Islam. I am confident that the Instruction will meet these requirements as well as articulate the need to promote a pastoral programme open to new developments yet always attentive to the duty of pastoral workers to collaborate fully with the local hierarchy.

3. It is in this context that the theme of your Congress was chosen: “Starting Afresh from Christ: towards a renewed pastoral care of migrants and refugees”. Taking my Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* as its starting point, you intend to consider today’s challenges in the light of the Word of God and the teachings of the Church, emphasizing charity and taking into special consideration the mystery of the Eucharist, particularly its celebration on Sunday. I encourage you in this task and remind you that it is not a formula that we seek but a Person, and the assurance which he gives us: “I am with you always” (*Mt 28:20*).

To this end, I affirm once again that pastoral renewal, regardless of the particular focus, “is not a matter of inventing a ‘new programme’. The programme already exists: it is the plan found in the Gospel and in the living Tradition. Ultimately, it has its centre in Christ himself who is to be known, loved and imitated, so that in him we may live the life of the Trinity, and with him transform history until its fulfilment” (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 29). This is our common proclamation of Christ, which must “reach people, mould communities, and have a deep and incisive influence in bringing Gospel values to bear in society and culture” (*ibid.*).

4. It is precisely in society and in culture that we must show respect for the dignity of man, of the migrant and of the refugee. In this regard, I once again urge States to adhere to the International Convention for the Protection of the Rights of Migrant Workers and their Families which took effect on 1 July 2003. Similarly, I appeal to States to respect the International Treaties concerning refugees. Such protection of human persons must be guaranteed in every civil society and espoused by all Christians.

5. With gratitude for the work of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People and the support of all those who collaborate with it, I gladly share these reflections with you and encourage you in your deliberations over the next five days. To you and all those entrusted to your particular care I impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of strength and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ.