

The Holy Family in Exile

In the Holy Family, we see the story of every refugee family. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, when they fled to Egypt for safety, shared in the fears and experiences of every migrant, and refugee forced to leave their native land. Later in his life, Jesus continued to identify as a “stranger” in need of welcome (Matthew 25:35) and regularly experienced the hardship and grief of exile as a man with “nowhere to lay his head” (Luke 9:58). Jesus and the Holy Family, therefore, serve as the perfect models and protectors for all migrants and refugees.

Welcoming the stranger

Following the example of Jesus, the Catholic Church seeks to welcome migrants and refugees, knowing that when we welcome the stranger who knocks at our door seeking refuge, we welcome Jesus. As Jesus said, *“Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.”* (Matthew 25:40). Jesus identifies with the needs of rejected strangers and sees generosity to them as part of our most important duty to *“Love your neighbour as you love yourself”* (Mark 12:31).

This teaching of Jesus echoes God’s command in the Scripture to welcome the stranger. The people of Israel were charged to *“treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; have the same love for him as for yourself; for you too were once aliens in the land of Egypt.”* (Leviticus 19:33-34).

And today, the Catholic Church continues to advocate for the dignified treatment of all migrants and refugees. Pope Francis invites us to a more profound awareness of the mission of the Catholic Church: *“We ourselves need to see, and then to enable others to see, that migrants and refugees do not only represent a problem to be solved, but are brothers and sisters to be welcomed, respected and loved.”*[1]

Human Dignity

The Catholic Church responds to the crises faced by the world’s migrants and refugees by proclaiming the dignity of every human being. Human life is sacred because each person is created in the image and likeness of God. As a result, every human being should be seen as an irreplaceable member of the human family.

The human dignity and human rights of asylum seekers must be respected, regardless of their citizenship, visa status or mode of arrival. This means that migrants and refugees have an equal right to the basic necessities for a healthy life, including food, water, shelter and safety. When migrants and refugees are not afforded these rights it is clear that, in the words of Pope Francis, *“yet in practice, by our decisions and the way we treat them, we can show that we consider them less worthy, less important, less human”*[2] (FT 39).



CATHOLIC CHURCH TEACHING ON MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office

[1] Francis (2014), Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees (2014).

[2] Francis (2020), Fratelli Tutti, 39.





The right to seek asylum

All people have the right not to migrate and to live a dignified life in their homeland. However, war, natural calamities, persecution and discrimination of every kind have deprived millions of livelihoods, communities and homelands. Until substantial progress is made to remedy these problems, the Catholic Church teaches that anyone whose life is threatened has the right to protect and provide for themselves and their family.

Rights and Responsibilities of States

All nations have a right to regulate migration across their borders. The right of nations to regulate their borders is an extension of the right of all persons to live a safe and dignified life in their community. As not every migrant in need can be welcomed into any one country, nations also need to realistically assess their capacity to accommodate new people.

However, the right to regulate borders is coupled with the responsibility to prioritise the needs of all people, particularly the most vulnerable. This includes a duty to be generous to as many people as possible who are in desperate need after fleeing oppressive conditions in their homeland. Borders are for the protection of people, not for the exclusion of people seeking protection.

Justice and Mercy

The purpose of the law is to serve justice and mercy. It is not illegal to seek asylum, and the migrants who seek refuge in Australia are not criminals for doing so. Laws that subject asylum seekers to arbitrary and prolonged immigration detention, stop them from seeking protection or split up families fail to recognise their fundamental dignity. The Catholic Church advocates the implementation of just and rapid procedures to determine each person's claim for protection.

implementation of just and rapid procedures to determine each person's claim for protection. Migration status should also not be a barrier to accessing education, housing, healthcare or employment opportunities. A just response to migration includes initiatives that welcome migrants into the community, ensuring decent living conditions and protecting people from exploitation.

The right to be part of a community

All people have the right to be part of a community. Asylum seekers who have had to leave their homeland have a duty to integrate into the community in their new home. This integration must be supported by helping migrants find a place where they may live in peace and safety, find work and take on the rights and duties that exist in the country that welcomes them. The participation and capabilities of migrants and refugees should be welcomed as a vital contribution to the community. To build a community that is prepared to welcome, protect, promote, and integrate everyone.



www.acmro.catholic.org.au



info@acmro.catholic.org.au

