

# “Every tribe and tongue, people and nation”

Rev 5:9

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Refugee children in the camp of Skaramagas (Athens, Greece)

Races, languages, cultures, people and nations, divide us human beings. The diversity is beautiful, but is also the cause of violence when persons distrust each other and feel threatened by those who are different.

Who of us would like to live with **foreigners**? Isn't it uncomfortable to have to get along with someone who speaks another language, who has another reactivity, who understands things in another way? In general, all of us feel more at ease with those who are "our own".

In the **Bible**, God's wish to unite the peoples dispersed throughout the world appears time after time. The aim of Christ's death is precisely that: making the two peoples (the diversity of peoples) just one, breaking "down the dividing wall of enmity" (Eph 2:14). Eschatology describes it as the great call of "those from every tribe and tongue, people and nation" (Rev 5:9). The encounter with the foreigner, that caused so much difficulty for Jesus himself (let's remember the episode of the Canaanite woman in Mt 15:21-28), is an essential part of the mystery of redemption.

## Internationality in our communities

Our **Constitutions** state that we are an international community, although it puts an accent on availability “to leave country, family, and familiar surroundings in order to serve wherever we are needed” (Const. 61). That is, internationality primarily has a practical character among us: we accept being foreigners and we accept foreigners in the measure that this serves to reinforce weak communities that need help. When the communities feel strong with their resources of personnel, hardly anyone sees the advantage or the convenience of continuing to have foreigners in the house.

The **General Chapter of 2012** considered the topic of “internationality and moving personnel throughout the Congregation” (cf. Chapter document). The Chapter states that “interculturality is also a reality which is lived within our own local communities and countries.” (nº 3); it recognizes the importance of inculturating oneself in the place where we carry out the mission; and gives some practical criteria to regulate the movement of brother from some countries to others. It also asks that we keep delving into the various themes related to internationality, since “experience tells us that we do not have a common understanding of what is internationality and what are its implications for our lives” (nº 2).

The **Enlarged General Council of 2014** tried to reflect a bit on these themes (cf. INFO 84 October 8, 2014). It asked that criteria of the quality of religious life and mission be kept in mind at the time of making personnel exchanges between major communities. It recalled that adaptation to the local culture is an imperative criterion for the good of the mission. And it also encouraged fraternal charity when brothers from different cultures live together, in order to avoid the imposition of some over others.

All of these themes relating to internationality and multiculturalism are very important in regards to the quality of our fraternal life and our mission. But they fundamentally refer to how we form our communities and how we confront cultural diversity among ourselves, which sometimes is a very big challenge even among brothers of a same province. In any case, all of this constitutes an issue, we could call, “**ad intra**”.

Now let us think of “**ad extra**”, that is, the conflicts that exist in the world because of the diversity of peoples and nations, the suffering that that generates and how all of that affects us.

## The wounds of humanity: the displaced persons and the refugees

The movements of populations and the clashes and mixtures among various cultures

form part of the constant evolution of humanity. But, at the current time, the displacements of persons acquire **dramatic overtones** in many places in the world. A heartrending example is that of those who try to enter Europe, fleeing the wars in Syria, Afghanistan, Libya and Iraq, or immense areas of Africa that suffer from armed conflicts or from misery.

It is a question of people violently uprooted from their land, their country, their culture, their possessions, their families, and thrown into strange places where often they are poorly received and they are treated almost as if they were criminals. Many die on the road. Others see their families split up and remain blockaded in refugee camps with precarious conditions, without the possibility of returning to their native lands or of moving forward toward a viable future. They are persons whose civil rights are not recognized, removed from the public eye, threatened with deportation, held prisoner in camps, marked as illegals, treated as problems to avoid more than as human beings to welcome.

The displaced persons and refugees suffer the wounds of the divisions caused by differences of nationality and culture, which far too often translate into violence against the foreigner. They are, as Pope Francis repeats, one of the clearest exponents of **"the suffering flesh of Christ"**. And whoever wishes to get close to Christ, Francis also is accustomed to say, let them kiss the wounds of the poor".

People like us, who consecrate ourselves to the reparative love of God cannot be indifferent to this heartbreaking reality. **Reparation** seeks to heal the open wounds in relations between persons and between peoples. "God is the one repairing breaches, rebuilding fallen walls from their ruins and filling up cracks that have occurred in the covenant relationship between Him and His people" (A. Toutin, *Reparación*, 2016, pg. 236). The suffering of the displaced persons who seek refuge constitutes an urgent appeal to the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts today. In our displaced and refugee brothers and sisters, Christ himself stands at our door and knocks (cf. Rev 3:20), hoping that we might open and sit down together to eat.

This call can become abstract or theoretic if there is no **direct contact** with persons who live in a similar situation of helplessness. We need to know some refugees by name, listen to their stories, give a face to this undefined mass of persons for whom, perhaps, we often pray but we do not concretely know.

One can make contact with displaced persons and refugees in different ways: helping in welcome centers, involving ourselves in activities of accompaniment, welcoming some in our houses, etc.

Brothers, everything that you might do to make direct contact with these persons will be a blessing for you and a source of inspiration for our mission today. I tell you this from my own experience.

In this way, we draw closer to Jesus, who was a refugee with his family in Egypt, and who blesses those who, welcoming the stranger, welcome him (Mt 25:35).

