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MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE LEO XIV FOR THE 112th WORLD DAY OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

27 September 2026

[**Multimedia**]

Even Just One of These Children (cf. Mt 18:10)

Dear brothers and sisters,

Each year the World Day of Migrants and Refugees invites us to turn our attention to different aspects of the complex phenomenon of migration. For this 112th World Day, the theme, “Even just one of these children,” draws our attention to the minors directly involved in the experience of migration and flight, to the care owed to them, and to the Lord’s promise that “whoever receives one such child in my name receives me” (Mk 9:37).

Displaced minors: a complex reality of vulnerability

Minors are the most vulnerable group within the global movements of migration. They are concrete faces, who have unique stories, and call on our conscience. Every year, millions of children and adolescents are forced to leave their homeland because of war, poverty, violence, environmental disasters and other tragedies. Sadly, their number continues to grow. The economic, political and military consequences of this disaster are immense. The suffering of migrant children does not end with their relocation. There are very young children who have lost parents, brothers, sisters and friends, and who have witnessed unspeakable acts of violence. Others, separated from their families for long periods, try to reunite with them while enduring the anguish of separation. There are also minors who make the journey together with their parents, yet are exposed to extreme and traumatic conditions. Finally, we cannot forget the tragic situation of those separated from their parents because of repatriation.

To this already appalling situation are added further tragedies: deaths along migration routes, trafficking and exploitation, the recruitment of minors for use in armed conflicts, sexual violence, forced marriages, and the atrocities they have suffered or witnessed during their travels. Their dignity is trampled upon in countless ways.

In his [Message for the 2017 World Day of Migrants and Refugees](#), dedicated to the theme "Child Migrants, the Vulnerable and the Voiceless", [Pope Francis](#) recalled that migrant children "in a threefold way are defenceless: they are children, they are foreigners, and they have no means to protect themselves. I ask everyone to help those who, for various reasons, are forced to live far from their homeland and are separated from their families."

Yet, amid so much darkness, the light of solidarity is not lacking. Individuals, families, civil institutions and ecclesial communities choose not to pass by on the other side (cf. *Lk* 10:29-37). We think of the families who open the doors of their homes in order to restore to these children the warmth of a family hearth; the educators who serve in reception centers; the volunteers and aid workers who each day devote themselves to healing the invisible wounds of these little ones along migration routes and in our cities. They bear witness through their commitment that love can overcome indifference.

Even just one of these children

Before this tragic reality, my thoughts turn to the words of Jesus that profoundly challenge our consciences: "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me" (Mt 18:5). It is not a question of numbers or statistics. The Gospel invites us not to calculate: *even one*. Every child, every human being, possesses an infinite dignity. Each is created in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen 1:26); each is a presence of the Lord. Before every migrant child, we are called to make an act of humanity and faith, for we are able to welcome and encounter the Lord. This call becomes even more pressing in the light of another of the Lord's affirmations in the Gospel of Matthew: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Mt 25:35).

Sadly, migrant children are more easily ignored, because they lack adults capable of protecting and supporting them. It is necessary, then, to intervene in their countries of origin in order to remove the causes that compel them to flee, while at the same time offering protection and welcome in the countries of transit and destination. The cry of displaced children rises to God today, just as did the cry heard in the Book of Exodus: "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them" (Ex 3:7-8). God hears their cry and, in order to bring about liberation, he forcefully appeals to the conscience and action of each one of us, just as he did with Moses. We cannot remain indifferent, nor can we become accustomed to such suffering.

An appeal to the responsibility of all

Even just one of these children calls each one of us, *in our personal lives*, to open our eyes and heart to a profound listening to his or her story, fears and dreams, overcoming that detachment which reduces the human person to a statistic that does not directly concern us. It is an invitation to recognize the dignity of each child, even before considering the condition of being a "migrant," and to safeguard his or her fundamental rights: the right to life, education and a standard of living that enables full physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.

Even just one of these children calls us, *in the life of the Church*, to transform welcoming from an abstract concept into a stable pastoral practice. We cannot simply delegate this task to institutes or associations endowed with a particular charism. Before the concrete faces that confront us in daily life, the entire Christian community is called to regard these children as its own sons and daughters, and to engage with the concrete story of each one of them. Christian communities should be encouraged to promote the integration of refugees and migrants and to value them as full members of the ecclesial family, fostering new educational and spiritual paths, including personalized ones, which go beyond the mentality of mere assistance. In particular, it is essential to prevent the solitude, isolation and rejection that not infrequently also affect the children of migrants; and to promote opportunities for encounter and integration in which local young people and young migrants can support each other along a path of mutual respect, solidarity and friendship.

Even just one of these children, *within the horizon of the different religions*, reminds us that the vulnerability of the young knows no religious boundaries and unites us in a shared humanitarian and spiritual responsibility. This becomes fertile ground for a concrete interreligious dialogue, in which believers, drawing upon their own sense of transcendence, cooperate in weaving networks of protection. Faith communities are called to create spaces in which every boy and every girl is respected and valued in his or her own cultural identity, thereby preventing the risk of radicalization by extremist groups. Ultimately, to protect a child is to safeguard the divine image imprinted within him or her.

Even just one of these children, *in the context of civil institutions*, calls us to reaffirm the principle of the best interests of the child. Public and private institutions are bound to prioritise the protection and dignity of every single child and adolescent. This requires the adoption of effective legal instruments of protection, the promotion of family reunification, and the prevention of the trauma caused by separation. An urgent change of perspective is needed: the focus of the debate must shift from the mere management of migration to the full and immediate protection of human rights, adopting "a coordinated, supportive and effective response, capable of guaranteeing protection, welcome and genuine opportunities for integration to those who migrate" (*Address to the Spanish Parliament*, Madrid, 8 June 2026).

Let us entrust migrant and refugee children to the maternal protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary who, together with Saint Joseph and the child Jesus experienced the cruelty of Herod's violence and the tragedy of exile in Egypt (cf. *Mt* 2:13-15). May she accompany their steps and help our communities to become living and credible signs of the Gospel.

From the Vatican, 11 August 2026, Memorial of Saint Clare of Assisi

LEO PP. XIV

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