

The Message of a 'Migrant Pope' in the Americas

Gennaro Matino (September 17, 2015)



We can't become men without engaging our fellow man. That seems to be the slogan of Pope Francis' trip to the United States, during which he will become the first pope in history to speak before Congress in Washington, D.C., before appearing at the United Nations in New York and the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia.

The Pope has come from the other side of the world to visit "his own" world, the Americas, which in just a few centuries has changed the fate of the planet and imposed its "style" on distant nations and ancient customs.

It's a continent predominantly composed of émigrés – a fact attested to by Francis' own origins as the descendant of an Italian immigrant family in Argentina –, full of surprises, teeming with



contradictions and blighted by inequality. Traveling from north to south, one witnesses a lightning-quick shift from economic power to economic marginalization, from the promise of development to hopeless scarcity.

“Lightning-quick” could also describe the way the Pope took up the cause of the poor on his trip to Ecuador, Bolivia and Paraguay this past summer; prophetically acknowledged the world’s new sense of solidarity with Cuba; and persuasively argued for the protection of all creation in the United States. “Let us protect Christ in our lives so that we can protect others,” said [Pope Francis](#) [2], “so that we can protect creation!” He also retraced what has been the essence of his preaching with renewed vigor.”

Being a protector, however, is not something that involves Christians alone; it also has a prior dimension which is simply human, involving everyone. It means protecting all creation, the beauty of the created world, as the [Book of Genesis](#) [3] tells us and as [Saint Francis of Assisi](#) [4] showed us. It means respecting each of God’s creatures and respecting the environment in which we live. It means protecting people, showing loving concern for each and every person, especially children, the elderly, those in need, who are often the last we think about.” Protecting creation. In other words, not just protecting individual lifestyles but building a community of brotherly love. Such protection, he continued, “requires kindness, requires tenderness.”

We can’t become men without engaging our fellow man. And yet we prefer to hide; going it alone is our daily bread. By vying for the world’s supplies, nations risk waging war. “The urgent challenge to protect our common home,” said the Pope, “includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change. I offer an urgent appeal then for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. The environmental challenge we are facing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all.”

When forced to talk to one another, in our differences we discover demons, fears that hound us and disturb our peace. And if we have to engage one another, if we’re really compelled to, then we tend to prefer engaging with our doubles, mirror images of ourselves, those who won’t talk back, whose existence we recognize precisely because it does not conflict with our own. Our fear of confrontation leaves us few options and what options it does, are destructive: we choose to either run away from or attack and annihilate the other.

We live together, work together, walk side by side down the same chaotic roads, yet we remain cut-off, irremediably alone. And yet it is imperative we reach out to one another. There’s a beautiful Midrash passage (Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:13) in which God says to Adam: “Now all that I have created, I created for your benefit. Be careful that you do not ruin and destroy my world;

for if you destroy it, there is no one to repair it after you.” Our fear of losing possessions generates more suffering and anxiety than the pleasure we derive from possessing them in the first place. It’s clear that calls like Pope Francis’ in New York, to be rid of possessions, are really a re-proposal of the proper use of our earthly goods.

They do not threaten the idea of property. Instead they affirm the principle of sharing, “the duty to limit power in such a way that man, making use of it, can remain a man.” We can’t become men without engaging our fellow man. Harmonious existence is only produced by people through dialogue, understanding and confronting the perils of diversity, only through the agony and toil of the common word. There’s no doubt we are at risk of going out of existence. And we can’t make mankind without talking.



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