

Panel:

“CONTRIBUTION OF MIGRANTS TO DEVELOPING COUNTRY OF ORIGIN AND DESTINATION”

THE MIGRANT FAMILY AS A GENERATOR OF WEALTH

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First, my thanks to Ms. María Elena Bibiesca and the organizing committee for inviting the Commission for Pastoral Care of Human Mobility (DPMH) to participate in this important event. His Excellency Rafael Romo Muñoz, Archbishop of Tijuana and head of this mission within the Mexican Episcopal Conference, sends his warm greetings and prayers, and trusts that the experience shared today may be a unifying theme in the mission that you are, and will be, carrying out with families, especially with migrant families.

The organizers have asked DPMH to talk on the subject of the migrant family as a generator of wealth, and I congratulate them upfront. For truly, the migrant worker and his family carry with them a cultural and religious heritage rich with Christian elements,¹⁵⁶ and through their mother tongue express a mentality, mindset and culture that are features of their spiritual life and of the traditions of their churches and communities of origin.¹⁵⁷

This, then, gives us an indication that migrants and their families carry with them an immense wealth of culture, values and customs, without ignoring that they also carry with them anti-values, of which we must be mindful. I call on the migrants' countries of origin, where often migration is only seen as a generator of remittances, to look at

¹⁵⁶ c.f. E.A, 65

¹⁵⁷ C.f. DPMC, 11

it from a more human perspective, so that they can address the social flow from a more comprehensive point of view.

Is it possible to find family, wealth, people in migration?:

Perhaps it may seem difficult to keep in mind the people, and the families behind or alongside them, when thinking about migration, because we have become used to seeing and speaking of migratory flow in terms of its positive or negative social effects as related to: migrant law, migrant remittances, migrant criminals and migrant national security concerns, and not in terms of deeper issues, such as the migrant himself.

So I dare to assert that, indeed, we find wealth in migration, because the migrant is part of a family and, directly or indirectly, the entire family, their community and their cultural environment migrates. In this context, we can say that people migrate with values, dreams, ideals and prospects, though also with shortcomings and vices.

To discover the family environment of the migrant that also moves in the migratory flow is important. We need to internalize it in our attitudes, and free ourselves from the poor and degrading views and pity that we have for those who migrate, in order to see them with the dignity and rank to which they are entitled, as expressed by the bishops of Latin America when they say that the family (and, in this case, the migrant worker and his family) is one of the most important treasures of the people of Latin America and the Caribbean.¹⁵⁸ It is part of our World Heritage.¹⁵⁹

For the supreme value that the migrant and his family have, it is important that we always aim as hard as possible for migrants to be able to benefit from the reintegration of the family as part of the migratory process. We need to be open as a society, as individuals, to see them with the place of dignity that belongs to them within society, in the countries of origin, transit or destination.

¹⁵⁸ Aparecida document, art. 432

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

This is a call to the conscience of all listeners or readers to see them as people, as citizens of the universe, with rights and obligations, with access to public policies, with the right to freely express their faith, their cultural heritage, to develop in the country that feeds them (Blessed Scalabrin).

Above all, we need to defend, the right of the migrant to live in a family and to be with his family, because it is there, in the heart of the family's, where a person learns, or should learn, to dream, to map out his life objectively, to face life with its successes, challenges and failures, however far he is from the land of birth, to experience diversity and unity. It is in the family where one learns to face death and illness, to position oneself in life as a person and member of a society. It is in the family where one learns to have faith, confidence, hope, etc.

With these reflections, I will examine the incalculable wealth brought about by the migrant and his family to a people or society, and the challenges it places on the inhabitants of that society.

Migration enriches peoples and humanity

Emigration, immigration, transmigration and the return of migrants to their places of origin have become global phenomena in today's world, creating challenges for nations to keep the family environment alive and well. Yet the legal restrictions that host countries apply, striving to attract and retain single men and women, incomplete families, to satisfy their production needs, fail to take into account the migrant as a person, his family and his environment.

The struggle of those committed to the cause of migration, is to reveal the harm done to humanity by the separation of families, as a result of restrictive laws geared to economic factors, rather than to the well-being of the individual person. The structural decomposition of small families, and new ways of being and living as a family, have hurt not only a people, but all humanity. It is necessary to commit to showing the good it would do mankind if migrants and their families were reunited.

So, the changes that these movements of people/families cause in social reality are to be seen from the point of view of wealth, and not loss, because the culture, customs, religions, food, music, etc. of the people migrating permeate our communities, and transform or enrich the host peoples, and humanity itself.

An example of the result of thousands of years of migrations is the diversity and cultural richness to which we are witnesses today. It is said that the diversity of culture in the contemporary world is "just a fraction of the diversity that has existed."¹⁶⁰

The migration of people, families and environments today offers us the opportunity to see and to live in societies that are increasingly multicultural (which does not necessarily mean a relationship or integration between cultures, between people). Nevertheless, they make it possible for multiculturalism to become interculturalism; from mixing to a relationship, to a welcome, to integration, to accepting ourselves as diverse and equal, that is, to live and coexist naturally in the unity of diversity.

We need to position migrants, families and society in the new concept of migration.

The greatest challenge we have ahead is what can be done for migration and its changes to become a natural process: how to continue being myself as a person, family and society, without depriving you of the chance to be yourself as a person, family and society?

If we want to leave the generations to come a world of cultural wealth, we have to be concerned about being recognized and valued as individuals, as families, as ethnic peoples, capable of contributing something to humanity, as well as valuing migrant families arriving in our lands as equals. No cultures or people are better or worse; they are only different. No cultures or people have greater or less dignity. It is important to bear this in mind in order not to annihilate our being and living in this

¹⁶⁰ Mark Pagel y Ruth Mace, "The Cultural Wealth of Nations", *Nature*, v. 428, March 18th 2004, p. 275

global village; in order not to lose our identity as a person, family or society, but rather to enrich ourselves with cultural diversity.

It seems to me that there is a great challenge ahead for everyone: for those who legislate, to generate and promote sound migration policies that allow such integration, as well as at the education level, to create spaces of openness and acceptance of diversity. It certainly poses a great challenge to society, religions and countries of origin, transit, destination and return, to achieve this goal, and to preserve the rich heritage left to humanity by migration, and not to close ourselves off in fear and xenophobia, which demean us.

Some examples of the changes migrant workers and their families bring to society and to humanity.

I will point out some examples just to show that in migration there are indeed riches, and we can deal with them with open or closed minds, depending on how we see and experience the migrant world in which we find ourselves.

Migration has transformed gastronomy: A simple example in Mexico is black beans, as a staple food.

For the people of the central and southern parts of the country, they are a treat. But for the people of the northern part of the country, black beans are not part of the basic food offerings on supermarket shelves. Now that migrants and their families from the central and southern regions have established themselves in the northern and border regions, such as Sonora, Sinaloa, Tijuana, etc., black beans are out on the supermarket shelves, along with other types of beans that are common in the north, creating interest among these populations to try this food, since the migrant families themselves have begun to prepare and sell them as part of the daily menu.

Migration has led to changes in musical styles and dance rhythms. For example, listening to a band, we identify the rhythm with the state of Sinaloa, because the musical style is characteristic of this region. However much of this type of music identifies or belongs to a people, migration has carried this style of music with it,

permeating our country and beyond. It's not just music to listen to, but music that transforms ways of dancing, moving and expressing joy; so much so that the Caribbean, Europeans and Latinos learn to move to the beat of this band, and their very human constitutions adapt themselves to these rhythms.

Migration has caused changes in religion, or religions. Here we can speak of the faith and devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe. Mexican migrants and families in the United States, and specifically in Chicago, have built a replica of the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and have named it *la Villita*, in order to go on a pilgrimage on December 12, to pray and express their love for the Virgin in unity and devotion, as do the Mexican people here in her Sanctuary.

This is a devotion that has permeated the faith of a very Protestant people, and has been introduced to other cultures, different from the Mexican culture that has taken it as its own. This expression of faith and devotion is very flattering, because it is interesting to see Asians, Europeans, Africans, Latinos, etc., make a pilgrimage to the hill, and bow to pray to the Virgin of Guadalupe, or get up early in the morning to sing a serenade to Our Lady.

The same is true of mosques and places of worship of other religions, which are being established in response to the spiritual needs of migrant families, etc.

This wealth that the Mexican people have given to humanity has also enriched them. Just consider this cosmopolitan city, Mexico City, and see how other cultures have enriched us with their tenacity, their determination, their ways of being and living in the family. We can take a look at the determination the Jewish community has had to have to position itself in our nation. It is worthwhile to assess their strength in the workplace, their food, culture, etc. The same can be said of the Lebanese, the Spanish, and the Colombians, etc.

I believe, and I dare say, that the migrant worker and his family remain conquerors, precursors of a different way of being and living in the world, and so we must recognize the cultural and human heritage that migration bequeaths to a renewed and renewing humanity.

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