
The Pope in Marseille. Msgr. Baturi (CEI): “Saving human lives entails the freedom not to migrate”

Upon his return from Marseille, and after the Pope's words of appreciation during yesterday's Angelus for the Italian Church's welcome to migrants, Monsignor **Giuseppe Baturi**, Archbishop of Cagliari and Secretary General of the Italian Episcopal Conference, offers SIR an overview and a perspective: working with civil authorities to offer migrants a better future, starting with the freedom to choose between migrating or staying. **After Bari and Florence, what message did Pope Francis want to send from Marseilles?** After Bari and Florence, in Marseille the Holy Father reaffirmed the importance and centrality of the Mediterranean region, which is surrounded by a multitude of peoples, cultures and religions, but is also where the tensions of the world are unleashed: let us suffice to mention the problems of migration, energy, climate and ethnicities.

What Pope Francis has proposed in Marseille is an inspiring vocation: to transform this crossroads of peoples, religions and cultures into a cradle of goodness and peace for the Mediterranean and for the world

It is also a vocation inherent in the geographical and historical context of the Mediterranean. Migration, in particular, challenges our concern for peoples and for their living conditions. We should all ask ourselves, at every level, what we can do to welcome, protect, promote and integrate these brothers and sisters of ours. **One of the issues highlighted by the Pope is rescue at sea, a duty to be fulfilled in order to prevent crimes against humanity. Italy, with the island of Lampedusa, is in the front line, and not only...** From Marseille, the Holy Father wanted to draw attention to the need for hospitality in order to save human lives: it is no coincidence that Pope Francis speaks of our migrant brothers and sisters who cross the *Mare Nostrum* in search of life. Saving lives also involves the freedom not to migrate, cooperating with the countries of departure and actively contributing to the prevention of climate hazards, wars and food crises. To this end, it is necessary to legalise routes, to promote community channels and bonds, and to support integration - which, as the Pope never tires of repeating, does not mean assimilation, but rather ensuring that the cultural and identity characteristics of the countries of origin are never lost, helping migrants to become the protagonists of their own liberation, and thus make a significant contribution to the future of our nation. **At the Palais du Pharo and during the Angelus prayer yesterday, the Pope referred to migration as a human right, which includes both the right to emigrate and the right to remain in one's homeland. The Italian Episcopal Conference has led the way with its campaign 'Free to leave, free to stay.'** **What is the situation in Italy and what steps can be taken?** The Message for the 109th World Day of Migrants and Refugees focuses on the freedom of migrants to choose whether to leave or to stay. This is what the Italian Bishops' Conference has given voice to with the initiative 'Free to leave, free to stay'. Freedom means choosing one's destiny, starting from a vital necessity: migrants must be guaranteed opportunities and relationships for their potential development. Offering hope for the future means not only investing financially, but also investing in friendly, warm and fraternal relations with local communities. This is a crucial point:

the right to stay is not legally defined, but it is inherent, it relates to the personal, cultural and social relationships that are interwoven along one's personal path.

From this perspective, saving lives means protecting the freedom to remain within relationships, doing everything possible to ensure that migrants can lead a happy life. **Does this include a commitment to promote dialogue and cooperation with civil and political authorities?** Yes, because the concrete solutions to problems such as migration, which are no longer emergencies but

structural problems, can be found together through a dialogue between the Church and society. We have already experimented this approach in Florence. Part of the historic vocation of the Mediterranean is the ability to involve those responsible for the common good.

Dialogue with civil authorities needs to be developed, otherwise it won't be possible to transform the migratory crisis into an opportunity for development

We need an awakening of humanity and conscience to prevent the collapse of civilisation, Francis said at the Velodrome. Should this be the aim of the 'Theology of the Mediterranean' and of the Conference of Bishops of the Mediterranean, already called for in Bari and Florence? In Marseille, the Holy Father said that the concern for the fate of migrants must be translated into concrete action, in a language of friendship and mutual support. Pope Francis reiterated his call for a permanent dialogue between Churches experiencing different situations and difficulties, especially on the southern shores of the Mediterranean, as we have seen in the Balkans, Syria and Lebanon. The idea of a theology of the Mediterranean implies the need for discernment of a historical situation together: it is up to us to accept this invitation, which is a call to responsibility. We can only share our reality and discuss the concrete forms of mutual support by getting to know each other in the name of fraternity, as happened in Bari and Florence. **The Synod of the universal Church on the theme of synodality is drawing near. Has the time come for a Synod for the Mediterranean region as well?** The Pope's call for an ecclesial assembly for the Mediterranean region is a further invitation to adopt a synodal perspective, a style of dialogue and discernment that is capable of identifying the structural events that will lead to agreement and common progress towards solutions. We must help each other to interpret this appeal of the Holy Spirit to our freedom. It is the breath of God that flows, enters our history and continues to cross our shores like migrants in search of salvation.

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