
The Pope in Cyprus and Greece: “Fraternity, an antidote to walls and barbed wire”

Two countries, one message: to replace the logic of walls and barbed wire with that of fraternity and dialogue. Pope Francis sent a strong message to Europe and the world from Cyprus, “where East and West unite”, and from Greece, cradle of classical culture and Western civilization. “Stop this shipwreck of civilization!”, is the Francis’ [appeal from the island of Lesbos](#), where he returned five years after his last visit to awaken human conscience, starting with looking into children’s eyes. Once again, “the cynical disregard that nonchalantly” ignores the inhuman conditions in which refugees live, such as those at the Reception and Identification Centre in Mytilene, embraced by Francis one by one, with their faces and their stories, is the most serious aspect. “*Let us not hastily turn away from the shocking pictures of their tiny bodies lying lifeless on the beaches*”, the Pope said, recalling the tragic death of Aylan, the Syrian three-year-old boy whose dead body was found washed up on a Turkish beach. “*The Mediterranean, which for millennia has brought different peoples and distant lands together, is now becoming a grim cemetery without tombstones*”, Francis denounced: “*Let us not let our sea (mare nostrum) be transformed into a desolate sea of death (mare mortuum). Let us not allow this place of encounter to become a theatre of conflict. Let us not permit this ‘sea of memories’ to be transformed into a ‘sea of forgetfulness’.*” These words were echoed during the [ecumenical prayer with migrants](#) in the parish church of the Holy Cross in Nicosia:

“Barbed wire is set up to prevent the entrance of refugees.

those who come in search of freedom, food, assistance, fraternity, joy, those fleeing from hatred but then find themselves facing a form of hatred called barbed wire. May the Lord awaken the conscience of us all before these realities. We cannot remain silent and look the other way amid this culture of indifference.” In the [meeting with authorities](#) in Cyprus, the Pope immediately mentions the fate of the most vulnerable people, notably the tragedy of migration: “Priority should be given to the weaker strata of society, especially those who statically belong to a minority group”, is his appeal further detailed in Lesbos:

“narrow self-interest and nationalism lead to disastrous consequences.”

“The greatest wound suffered by this land has been the terrible laceration it has endured in recent decades”, Francis said referring to the division of the island of Cyprus dating back to 1974. Dialogue is the only way leading to the healing of society: “*there is a power of gestures, which prepares the way of peace. Not gestures of power, threats of reprisal and shows of force, but gestures of détente and concrete steps towards dialogue.*” Necessary dialogue, through fraternity, also inside the Church, is the theme of the [first speech in Cyprus](#), addressed to the clergy. Fraternity in the Church means that “we may argue yet we remain brothers and sister”, Francis said. Hence the task entrusted to small Catholic community: “By your spirit of fraternity, you can remind everyone, and Europe as a whole, that we need to work together to build a future worthy of humanity, to overcome divisions, to break down walls, to dream and work for unity.” “Being a minority – and do not forget that the Church throughout the world is a minority – does not mean being insignificant, but closer to the path loved by the Lord”, Francis said addressing the [Catholic community of Athens](#) in the Cathedral of Saint Dionysius. “*Cyprus, as a geographic, historical, cultural and religious crossroads, is in a position to be a peacemaker*”, Francis told said in his meeting with authorities: “*May it be a workshop of peace in the Mediterranean.*” From Cyprus, the Holy Father sends a message to Europe: “The European continent needs reconciliation and unity; it needs courage and enthusiasm, if it is to move forward.

For it will not be the walls of fear and the vetoes dictated by nationalist interests that ensure its progress, nor will economic recovery alone serve to guarantee its security and stability.” Europe is also the focus of the Pope's [address to the Greek authorities](#) from Athens, where democracy was born: “This country, naturally welcoming, has seen on some of its islands the arrival of numbers of our migrant brothers and sisters greater than the number of their native inhabitants; this has heightened the difficulties still felt in the aftermath of the economic crisis. Yet **Europe also continues to temporize: the European Community, prey to forms of nationalistic self-interest, rather than being an engine of solidarity, appears at times blocked and uncoordinated.**” Hence the appeal “to encourage **a global, communitarian vision with regard to the issue of migration,** and to urge that attention be paid to those in greatest need, so that, in proportion to each country’s means, they will be welcomed, protected, promoted and integrated, in full respect for their human rights and dignity. Rather than a present obstacle, this represents a guarantee for a future marked by peaceful coexistence with all those who increasingly are forced to flee in search of a new home and new hope.”

“It is for this hope that the deserts of today’s world are thirsting”,

the Holy Father remarked in his homily at the [Holy Mass in Athens’ Megaron Concert Hall](#), attended by over two thousand people. “Keep dreaming of fraternity!”, is the Pope’s message to [young people](#) gathered at Saint Dionysius School of the Ursuline Sisters for the last public meeting of the apostolic journey to Greece. “The meaning of life is not found by staying on the beach waiting for the wind to bring something new”, Francis said, recalling the figure of Telemachus, against the tide in our modern world, where “many people are constantly using social media, but are not themselves very social”: “Salvation lies in the open sea, in setting sail, in the quest, in the pursuit of dreams, real dreams, those we pursue with eyes open, those that involve effort, struggles, headwinds, sudden storms. Please don’t be paralyzed by fear: dream big! And dream together!”

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