

Immigration: Is it Really Not Our Business?

Gennaro Matino (March 27, 2015)



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“Millions of families today experience the dramatic condition of refugees,” writes Pope Frances. “And Jesus and his family faced the same difficult reality . . .” The problem of borders, of major waves of immigration affecting every corner of the world, of masses of people driven out by hunger, desperation, political terrorism, war and ecological devastation— the product of historical colonialism and present-day corruption—is a problem that concerns us and, more significantly, anyone hungry for justice.

“Refugees and immigrants,” adds the Pope, “aren’t always really welcomed, respected, or appreciated for the values they bring.” Like prisoners trapped in a mine, people from the Southern



Hemisphere arrive on our shores hoping for a better future, for a bit of air. Our shores in Italy have become a theater of adventure, a dream of redemption and defeat, where men, women and children, fleeing totalitarian regimes, arrive clinging to masts and makeshift boats. Too many people look the other way, the Pope seems to be saying, when faced with injustice and war. They have no compassion for their struggling neighbors. Instead they secure their own borders and hoard provisions, fearing a hypothetical worldwide disaster.

If pressed to welcome someone into our country, we do it out of self-necessity, not in the spirit of fraternity. When the poor immigrant comes to work here, neither her rights nor her dignity is always respected. Nor is her right to an honest contract.

We offer immigrants underpaid work, work we won't do anymore. The movement of immigrants from one part of the world to another would seem to be determined by the individual freedom that the global world has accepted. Opening borders to allow for free trade should, of necessity, allow people—more than goods—to cross borders. In reality, more often than not, what looks like free will is instead an obligation, a necessity dictated by survival instinct: relocation is not born out of the freedom to travel elsewhere, but rather out of the impossibility to do otherwise, since it's the economy that, by guaranteeing free borders, causes forced deportations, investing and disinvesting from one part of the planet to another, as it pleases.

"Justice sees not," writes Euripides in *Medea*, "with the eyes of those who hate unwronged at sight their fellow, ere they learn his character. The stranger needs must carefully conform himself to his adopted home; nor have I thought of praising the citizen who with his airs is rude unto his fellow, through ill-breeding."

Although he wasn't quoting Euripides, Pope Francis was certainly thinking of the Gospel when he reminded us that the culture of affluence makes us "insensitive to the screams of others," placing us "in a soap bubble," in a situation "that leads to indifference." Moreover, today there exists "globalized indifference."

"We have grown accustomed to the suffering of others, it doesn't concern us, it doesn't interest us, it isn't our business!" But is it really not our business?

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