



POPE FRANCIS AND MIGRATION*

Roberto Marinucci♦

I will present these five fundamental points according to the general thinking of Pope Francis, from some of his priorities. They are not the only possible elements. In the text's elaboration, I also thought of others. In the end, I have chosen these 5. They should be considered only as starting points for more profound reflections from a contextual point of view. Each historical, cultural and social context has its specific dynamics and priorities. They are just a starting point.

1) Witnessing the sense of responsibility

Pope Francis, evaluating the contemporary migratory conjuncture, underlines in the first place the need to strengthen our sense of responsibility regarding what happens not only near us but on the entire planet. In his homily in Lampedusa, he states, *"Today no one in the world feels responsible for this [the deaths in the Mediterranean]; we have lost a sense of responsibility for our brothers and sisters; we have fallen into the hypocrisy of the priest and the Levite whom Jesus described in the parable of the Good Samaritan"* (Lampedusa, 2013). In Pope Francis' opinion, *the globalization of indifference* produces a lack of responsibility towards the drama of millions of people.

It is worth pointing out that in contemporaneity, there are devices created to anesthetize the population. The "other," stigmatized by some social markers, ends up losing its humanity in the process of inferiorization. In this way, the manipulated and anesthetized population loses the sensitivity and the responsibility in relation to the suffering of others. In view of this, Pope Francis invites us, first of all, to overcome the "anesthesia of the heart" (Lampedusa, 2013). This has two critical outcomes: recognizing the equal dignity of all human beings and, at the same time, developing compassionate attitudes. Of these, I will speak further below.

* This text refers to the presentation, by the author, at the Seminar "The feminine face of the Scalabrinian Charisma", held on April 24, 2021, by the Zoom Platform, under the responsibility of the General Animation of the MSCS Apostolate, as part of the process of updating the Guidelines Generals of the Apostolate of the Scalabrinian Missionary Sisters (MSCS).

♦ Italian, married, father of two. Master in Missiology. Editor-in-chief of the Revista Interdisciplinar da Mobilidade Humana – REMHU and researcher at Centro Scalabriniano de Estudos Migratórios – CSEM – Brasilia/DF – Brazil.



Regarding the equality of all and every human being, today, as anthropologist Marco Aime¹ states, it is not enough to be born or live to exist socially: a document that confers dignity and rights is needed. Birth guarantees biological existence, but the political existence that attributes rights derives from the reference document, the passport. From this perspective, says Pope Francis, *"migrants are not seen as entitled like others to participate in the life of society, and it is forgotten that they possess the same intrinsic dignity as any person."* (FT 39). To take responsibility and compassion for the suffering of others implies recognizing that all people have the same dignity. It means recognizing *universal brotherhood*. We are all brothers and sisters. *Egalité presupposes fraternité*.

This sense of responsibility for the dramas that occur near and far from us should not generate feelings of guilt and impotence. We are fragile creatures, and we cannot solve all the planetary problems. Yet, we can set in motion local processes of change that will sometimes have global repercussions. As Pope Francis says, "it is possible to start from below and, case by case, act at the most and local levels, and then expand to the farthest reaches of our countries and our world, with the same care and concern that the Samaritan showed for each of the wounded man's injuries" (FT 78).

I repeat, the sense of responsibility is not a burden but a *call to respond* to the dramas of migrants and refugees within the limits of our possibilities. It is a *call to fight* against indifference, against the inferiorization of human beings, and even against the criminalization of migrations and migrant people.

2) Approach and encounter

Pope Francis insists a lot on the *"culture of encounter."* In the homily in Lampedusa, he uses this expression, which returns in various pronouncements. The idea of the *"culture of encounter"* can be interpreted in the view of *"closeness"* or *"approaching"* on which Pope Francis reflects in *Fratelli Tutti* concerning the parable of the Good Samaritan. The *"culture of encounter"* is the *"culture of approaching"*. To approach means overcoming boundaries, eliminating the walls, material and immaterial, that divide us from others. It is not something automatic; it is the product of proactivity, a decision, of choice—an irrevocable decision for those committed to the cause of migrants and refugees. To get closer also means to ascend or, more commonly, to descend in the condition of the other, to establish equal relations, symmetrical relations. The true encounter with the other, for Pope Francis, is, at the same time, the origin and consequence of an act of *"compassion,"* another theme very dear to the bishop of Rome. Closeness is born from an act of compassion and, at the same time, it generates, produces compassion, in the etymological sense of *"to suffer with,"* *"to experience the pain of the other."* This is why, on his return trip from the island of Lesbo, in

¹ AIME, Marco. La macchina della razza. Storie di ordinaria discriminazione. Eleuthera, 2013.



Greece, where many refugee seekers arrive from Turkey, the Bishop of Rome challenges: *"I would invite the arms dealers (...) to spend a day in that camp [of refugees]. I believe that for them, it would be salutary!"*. Closeness and encounter can be "salutary." The face-to-face relationship can break down stereotypes and typifications. It can move the heart. It can generate tears.

Perhaps this is why Pope Francis considers *"the gift of tears"* (Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, 2016) one of the most precious gifts we can receive. The Bishop of Rome develops a true "theology of tears," which is nothing more than the capacity for compassion, for empathy that arises from the encounter with the other. *"The globalization of indifference has taken away from us the capacity to cry!"* (Lampedusa, 2013), to weep for the *"thousands of people who weep as they flee horrific wars, persecution and human rights violations"* (Address to the Diplomatic Corps of the Holy See, 2016). Indeed, *"these are tears that lead to transformation; they are tears that soften the heart, they are tears that can purify the gaze and help one see the spiral of sin in which one is often entangled. They are tears that can sensitize the look and the hardened, and above all numb, attitude towards the suffering of others. They are the tears that can break us, capable of opening us to conversion. This is what happened to Peter after having denied Jesus; he cried, and those tears opened his heart."* (Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, 2016).

The encounter with the other produces tears and responsibility. Not only tears. These, when authentic, generate conversion, new attitudes, and new commitments. Compassion leads us to meet migrants and people seeking refuge. It takes us to the "squares." It is an unavoidable commitment for those involved in the cause of migrants and refugees.

3) Accompany

In number 64 of *Fratelli Tutti* the Pope says: *"Let us admit that, for all the progress we have made, we are still "illiterate" when it comes to accompanying, caring for, and supporting the frail and vulnerable members of our developed societies."* (FT 64). I want to draw attention to the term accompany, which the Pope frequently uses, including concerning persons with disabilities (FT 98), people who are suffering (FT 186), or the elderly (FT 19).

The term accompany comes from the Latin "cum panis." The companion (the companion) is that person with whom we share the bread. In this view, the term is related to "commensality" and, at the same time, to "mobility" (to walk together, to follow a person) and, if you like, also to "unity" (something is accompanied by another, something that complements). Dining is the space of sharing, invigoration, and, above all, of eliminating all social stratifications and barriers between people. The table is the place where, in principle, we are all equal. At the table, we share the same food. To accompany means to be a companion on the journey. To accompany means establishing a symmetrical and



equal relationship with the other and walking the other's path. I believe that Scalabrini's statement, "to be migrants with the migrants", can be interpreted in this view. The companions on the journey take care of each other, support each other reciprocally. The perspective of this term differs from other terms, like caring or protecting: in these cases, there is someone who cares and someone who is cared for, someone who protects and someone who is protected. The perspective of accompanying focuses on reciprocity: as companions, we protect and are protected, we educate and are educated, we sustain and are sustained.

Finally, after the approach, we are called to accompany. This has two implications: the concrete action will always be derived from the needs of the fellow migrants, who have a migratory project and are the subjects of their lives. It is only by walking together that we discover what to do. At the same time, we are always open to being helped and protected by our fellow migrants. The relational dimension is central. In a world that stratifies humanity - with superior and inferior beings - relating in an egalitarian way becomes a revolutionary act, in the sense of going against the logic of hierarchization and inferiority of the other. Before the *"doing," it is essential to "be" together with migrants and refugees in an egalitarian way as companions on the journey.*

In Fratelli Tutti (n. 39), Pope Francis says: *"No one will ever openly deny that they are human beings, yet in practice, by our decisions and the way we treat them, we can show that we consider them less worthy, less important, less human. For Christians, this way of thinking and acting is unacceptable since it sets certain political preferences above deep convictions of our faith: the inalienable dignity of each human person regardless of origin, race, or religion, and the supreme law of fraternal love. "*

4) Political love

To love God and neighbor. This is the synthesis of the whole law. Pope Francis clarifies one modality of love to the neighbor: *"Any effort along these lines becomes a noble exercise of charity. For whereas individuals can help others in need, when they join together in initiating social processes of fraternity and justice for all, they enter the "field of charity at it's most vast, namely political charity" (FT 180). The bishop of Rome speaks of "political action" as an act of "love," a term commonly used for interpersonal relationships. We listen to Pope Francis, who says: "love is expressed not only in intimate and close relationships but also in 'macro-relationships such as social, economic and political relationships'" (FT 181); or also: "It is an act of charity to assist someone suffering, but it is also an act of charity, even if we do not know that person, to work to change the social conditions that caused his or her suffering." (FT 186).*

Fighting for the change of unfair migratory laws, for the formulation and implementation of public policies that promote and defend human rights, for the planning and structuring of social actions, for the formation and sensitization of



society, for overcoming discourses of mistrust, of hate that emerge between one conversation and another in the spaces where we transit: these are some examples of acts of "love" for those who are far away. Pope Francis begins the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* by speaking of love for all people, "*regardless of where he or she was born or lives.*" (FT 1).

Political love goes beyond borders and walls. Political love reaches out to people who are unknown and far away. Political love is an act of complete gratuitousness because it is often performed with little visibility. In some cases, it is also an act that challenges the interests of the powerful, demanding civil disobedience and generating persecution. This is the case of numerous activists who defend and promote the rights of migrant people and are being persecuted because of this.

The "political love" arises from a sense of *responsibility* and compassion and complements the action of *drawing near* and *accompanying*. It is a necessary action, as Francis reminds us in Lesbo: "*To be truly in solidarity with those who are forced to flee their own land, we need to work to remove the causes of this dramatic reality: it is not enough to limit ourselves to solving the emergency of the moment, we need to develop policies of broad respite, not unilateral ones*" (Lesbo, Greece, 2016).

5) Generate processes

In *Evangelii Gaudium* (n. 222-237) Pope Francis lists 4 principles that "*specifically guide the development of social coexistence and the building of a people where differences are harmonized within a common project.*" Here I will not present all 4, but only one. *Time is superior to space*. Francis says: "*This principle allows us to work in the long term, without being obsessed by immediate results. It helps to bear with patience, difficult and hostile situations, or the changes of plans that the dynamism of reality imposes. [...] One of the sins which we occasionally observe in sociopolitical activity is that spaces and power are preferred to time and processes. Giving priority to space means madly attempting to keep everything together in the present, trying to possess all the spaces of power and of self-assertion; it is to crystallize processes and presume to hold them back. Giving priority to time means being concerned about initiating processes rather than possessing spaces. Time governs spaces, illumines them and makes them links in a constantly expanding chain, with no possibility of return. What we need, then, is to give priority to actions which generate new processes in society and engage other persons and groups who can develop them to the point where they bear fruit in significant historical events. Without anxiety, but with clear convictions and tenacity.* (EG 223).

The invitation of the Bishop of Rome is to generate processes in social action. Before immediate solutions imposed from places of power, it is preferable to generate new participatory dynamics that gradually mature over time and have



a profound impact on social reality. Before offering ready-made solutions for immediate gains, it is important to give tools and involve the largest number of interlocutors. This principle also invites us to think of migrants and refugees as "agents", as "interlocutors", in short, as subjects capable of building their lives, without offering ready-made solutions and recipes. *Fraternité* always implies *liberté*. This principle also urges us to offer "perspectives", "new horizons" to those who are denied the *right to a future*. Security implies freedom *from* fear and *from* need, but also freedom *to* live with dignity. In short, social action must give "future", "perspectives" and not only "security spaces".

In Pope Francis' words, "*The parable of the weeds* (cf. Mt. 13:24-30) *describes an important aspect of evangelization that consists in showing how the enemy can occupy the Kingdom's space and cause harm with the weeds, but is overcome by the goodness of the wheat that manifests itself over time!*"

Conclusion

"The world exists for everyone, because all of us were born with the same dignity. Differences of color, religion, talent, place of birth or residence, and so many others, cannot be used to justify the privileges of some over the rights of all." (FT 118).

To generate liberating processes, to love politically, to approach and accompany migrants and refugees is our responsibility as human beings, but also as Christians, because the encounter with the impoverished and migrant other is always a Eucharistic encounter: "Each one of you refugees who knock at our doors has the face of God, is the flesh of Christ" (Visit to the Astalli Center, 2013)².

Brasilia, 24.04.2021

Centro Scalabriniano de Estudos Migratórios – CSEM

² It is worth remembering the well-known text of Saint John Chrysostom: "If you would truly honor the body of Christ, do not consent that it be naked. Do not honor him here [inside the church] with silken garments, while outside you let him perish with cold and nakedness. Because the same one who says: "this is my body", is the one who said "you saw me hungry and you didn't give me to eat". And his word underlies our faith". (GONZÁLES FAUS, José Ignacio. *Vigários de Cristo: os pobres na teologia e espiritualidade cristãs - Antologia comentada*. São Paulo: Paulus, 1996, p. 32).