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Migrants and
Refugees:
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in search of
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On the morning of the 16 October 2017, in the grounds of the Church of the Sacred Heart, Donnybrook, there was a smell of burning. It was not the smell you get from an active fire, but the smell of burnt ash. October 16th was the day ex hurricane Ophelia reached Ireland. It carried with it ash, from the forest fires in Portugal, and sand, possibly from Africa. We live in one world. There are other storms, the storms of life, armed conflicts, wars, genocides, ethnic cleansings, natural disasters, environmental degradation, famine, poverty, economic crises and the absence of opportunity. All these generate movements of people across the world, driven by desperation, by hopelessness. The storms of life carry migrants and refugees.

Mr. Peter Sutherland, that great advocate for migrants and refugees, a member of this parish, named migration as the morally, politically and economically defining issue of the 21st Century. While migration and refugees have been a defining characteristic, and the cause of divisive political reactions and social tensions in recent years, homelessness has been the issue here in Ireland, and in Dublin in particular, since recovery began from the economic crash.

Pope Francis, in his message for the World Day of Prayer for Peace 2018, asks us to consider migrants and refugees, and we could add the homeless, with what he refers to as 'a contemplative gaze', the gaze of Mary, the contemplative woman. Migrants, refugees and those who are homeless, disturb us. Their plight touches us. They touch us not just because of our own Irish history but because they alert us to something deep within all of us, the desire for a life, for a better life, a more promising future. They alert us to our own humanity, the human needs we all share, to be someone. To be a human person we need to be noticed, to

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matter. We need an awareness of meaning and purpose to our lives. We need opportunity, opportunity to achieve our dreams and to contribute to the wellbeing of others. We want to do better by our children. Without these, the human heart is not at peace. If peace is absent from the human heart, it will also be absent in families, communities, workplaces, society and the world. Migrants, refugees, and the homeless, are people, people like all of us, people in search of peace.

The Scottish philosopher, John Haldene, at a talk at Haddington Road Church some years ago, said that our Western Civilisation is grounded on four pillars; the Jewish pillar – there is one God; the Greek pillar -there is objective truth; the Roman pillar – there is justice which the law must express; the Christian pillar: there is one humankind. The Christian Feast we celebrate today, the feast of Mary the Mother of God, gives expression in a special way to that fundamental truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. “The shepherds hurried away to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph and the baby laying in a manger.” They found a family who would share the experience of migrants, refugees and those who are homeless. The wonder of the Incarnation, God with us as one of us is a truth anchored in Jesus’ birth by Mary his mother. Jesus, Son of God, taking our flesh, teaches us that every human person is what Pope Benedict spoke of as a ‘loving thought of God’. Every human person, whether migrant, refugee, homeless or not, is a beloved daughter and son of God the Father of Jesus. God, in Christ, has become one of us and in becoming one of us has vindicated the equal value of every individual in the gaze of God and our equality as persons. “God the Father has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts” as we heard in Paul’s letter to the Galatians.

The great commandment, love the Lord your God with all your heart and your neighbour as yourself, a commandment which finds its highest expression in the commandment of Jesus, love your enemy, expresses our obligation to one another rooted in and arising from our common humanity. We live and express our humanity by co-operating in the task of making our shared world a home for everyone. Home has been described as the place where dreams are sheltered and given space to grow, where everyone has a place at the table, where difference is strength and where we hold things together against the odds. In order to express their dignity as persons, migrants and refugees require protection, welcome, the promotion of their integral human development and the opportunity to participate in the life of the society that welcomes them. When we as a community provide these we enhance the integrity of our own humanity. When we fail to do so, we ourselves are diminished and peace is threatened.

MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

In his Message for this day, Pope Francis, asks Government Leaders to protect, welcome, promote and integrate migrants and refugees while recognising that they have clear responsibilities to their own communities. He asks that they do so within the limits allowed by a correct understanding of the common good. May I say in this context that, as an Irish citizen, I feel embarrassed when I hear our political leaders pledging to seek pathways for the regularisation of undocumented Irish citizens in USA, when, at the same time, I hear nothing about regularising the many undocumented people here in Ireland.

Today, on this World Day of Prayer for Peace we call down the blessing of God's name on all the people of the world. We call down the gifts of God's Holy Spirit on leaders in particular. In doing so we are giving expression to our common humanity and our desire for peace. May the Lord uncover his face on all of us, open our eyes to his graciousness to us and to the needs of our sisters and brothers, migrants, refugees and those without a home, to bring on us and on our world in this New Year, His peace.

Meditation. It is less widely known that meditation can also bear deeper fruit in the human person and, consequently, in society. While the wisdom traditions of the world have always asserted that meditation promotes human flourishing at a very deep spiritual level, very little research has been undertaken to explore its extent. Part of the difficulty lies in defining what is meant by the terms I have just used. What is meant by 'spiritual'? What is 'human flourishing' and how can it be measured?

– NOEL KEATING, *Meditation with Children*, Dublin: Veritas, 2017, p.16.