

**Homily P. Benoit Grière, Superior General of Assumptionists, July 10, 2021, Year B, JPIC Session, Paris**

**AT THE THE CLOSING OF THE ASSUMPTION FAMILY SESSION ON MIGRATION, REFUGEES, DISPLACED PERSONS AND VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Our session on the theme of migration, refugees, displaced persons and victims of trafficking comes to an end today after a week of rich and fruitful work. The Eucharist that brings us together allows us to grow in communion among ourselves and with the world. To become the body of Christ, this is the intention of every Eucharist. To bring together the diverse members to make one body in the risen Christ. The Eucharist excludes no one because it is the sacrament of unity.

Today, perhaps more than ever, our world is marked by the question of migration and by the distress of displaced people. I heard on the radio a few days ago that the United Nations Commissioner for Refugees announced that there were more than 80 million people affected by this phenomenon and that this number had doubled in 10 years. The causes are multiple and unfortunately all too well known: war, hunger, persecution because of religious affiliation or political options, upheavals related to climate change. More and more our Earth is suffering and the world's inhabitants are exposed to distress and violence. It is time to act.

Our Christian faith, deeply rooted in the Old Testament, urges us to defend those who have left their homeland without having any other concern than to support and welcome them. Already the book of Leviticus says forcefully: "When an immigrant resides with you in your country, you shall not exploit him. The immigrant who resides with you shall be among you as a native Israelite, and you shall love him as yourself, for you yourselves were immigrants in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God." (Lev 19:33-34). Our human condition impels us to solidarity with all. We cannot exclude a part of humanity in order to keep our peace and to enjoy our happiness selfishly. Christ is the one who gave himself for all without exception.

Saint Augustine reminds us that we are all pilgrims because our homeland is the Kingdom of God. We are in a way migrants in search of the true homeland and our life is this journey that leads us to God.

Today's readings remind us of the condition of our ancestors in faith. They too were victims of the slave trade, like Joseph who was sold to merchants by his brothers and found himself far from home in Egypt. Our God who calls us his friends has the habit of approaching us in the guise of a stranger. Abraham and Sarah were quietly going about their business when three

strangers showed up and they treated them to sumptuous hospitality. Jesus himself accepted to become incarnate by taking on the human condition. God is one of us. If God has made himself close, how can we keep at a distance those who are of the same flesh as us? Jesus himself took on the face of the stranger. At the end of John's gospel, the risen Lord appears as a stranger to Mary Magdalene in a garden; to the disciples fishing, he is a stranger on the beach; and to the disciples on their way to Emmaus, he is the stranger they meet on the road. For us, it follows that if we wish to meet him, let us make friends with strangers. In these times of rising populism, there is no more important question than whether we can befriend strangers. The future of our civilization depends on whether we can. Our world is torn by terrorism and war; millions of people are nomadic, and the planet is facing displacement on a scale not seen in millennia. Will fear of strangers lead us to close our minds and hearts or will we dare to see them as close friends of God?

As Pope Francis says in Fratelli tutti, repeating a passage from his speech to the Diplomatic Corps in January 2016, "Migration will be a fundamental element of the world's future." He highlighted that the "loss of a sense of fraternal responsibility" was a strong threat to the constitution of "a community of belonging and solidarity." He asked that fear not deprive us of the capacity to encounter the other.

At the Assumption, we are all mobilized for the coming of the Kingdom of God. But this kingdom is a kingdom without borders. God in Jesus Christ has broken down the wall of hatred: "Christ is our peace: he has made both Jew and Gentile into one reality; by his crucified flesh he has broken down the wall of hatred that separated them" (Eph 2:14).
Our mission is to tear down the walls that separate and break down the borders that isolate. Our work is to grow in brotherhood and to become one people. The Kingdom of God is waiting for our commitment, now is a favorable time.