

## Symposium about migrants and refugees.

By Serge St-Arneault, M.Afr

I had the opportunity to attend a symposium organised by the Archdiocese of Montreal, on May 14 to 16 this year. This symposium was made possible with the collaboration of the Major Seminary of Montreal about the social and ecclesial issues concerning the reception of migrants and refugees. The theme was: **“More bridges, less walls”**

The speech often heard around us is often like this: Let us accept the migrants as long as they are useful and productive. We mean by this that they should be expelled or rejected after they had been used like any object that has lost its relevancy and value.

However, we benefit a great deal from welcoming the migrants and the refugees far beyond our fears nourished by the ideological trends and by some politicians. This fear is regularly associated with a loss and impoverishment of our own identity. This is particularly the case here in Quebec.

Yet Pope Francis campaigns for the globalisation of solidarities, basing himself on the principle that there is no sincere love without some sacrifices. The Christian spirit invites us to give a fair welcome to foreign populations and to their cultural expressions. It is this attitude that permits a beneficial growth of our own identity which is meant to be transformed, and mature, and expand.

Indeed, no cultural identity is static. Each identity, personal and collective, is enriched by the acceptance of the other. Strangely, it is the society that is open to others that benefits most.

The question that we ought to ask ourselves is this one: How can we foster the acceptance of a foreigner? To act like this, is to short-circuit the language of the alarmist and the negative notion of a fictitious migratory invasion. The concern of the believer ought to be that of the common good for all and living together, including everybody.

This requires the courage to revise our economic models in order to favour the integration of immigrants and refugees. This problem before everything else is a mental and spiritual one. The believers must always remember that every human being, from whatever cultural background he may come, is a child of God.

The migratory impact is a difficult question. The Bible provides many examples. Jesus himself had to readjust his own Jewish identity in his many encounters with non-Jews.



The episode with the Syrophenician woman (Jo 41-42) shows clearly that Jesus accepted to change his outlook toward that woman and toward all the Samaritans. He proved his universality.

The future of our Christian communities in Quebec and in a certain measure for the whole of Quebecers called “pure blood” is found in their capacity of enlarging the space of welcoming new people by favoring the spouting of “forward going communities». There is life. There can we find new ways of hope. There is no more room for a fossilized thought, entrenched in fear, paralysed by deceptive speeches of alarmists of all kind. To practice hospitality is fundamentally a sacramental sign. It means that Christ is recognised in the face of a stranger in our midst.



#### Questions:

- 1- How can we improve the respect for human dignity in every way, including the migrant and the refugee?
- 2- How should we promote the common good of the people, the local and the foreigner?
- 3- How can we foster a better distribution of the global wealth for a decent life and habitat?
- 4- Can we here and elsewhere promote the preferential option for and with the poor?
- 5- How can we sustain the democratic principles in all societies by sustaining an involved action of all citizen?
- 6- How to establish a solidarity on the moral level whereby everyone becomes responsible of all, in fighting for the social justice which includes the denunciation of abuses by those in authority and the fight against human slave trade?

The answer to all these questions comes from one principle: the respectful encounter, the just and sincere acceptance of someone, particularly the stranger and the refugee.

Thanks to the presence of Father Fabio Baggio, (the undersecretary of the section “Migrants and refugees” of the dicastery of the Office for human and integral development), a good number of priests and participants had the opportunity to reflect on the four **verbs** that Pope Francis had proposed to us facing the difficult challenge caused by the daily flux of migrants to the political authorities, the civil society and the

Church. This will require that we give an answer in a more urgent way and with a coordinated and effective manner.

**To welcome:** It means before everything else to offer to the migrants and the refugees a safe and legal access in a number of countries. A change of attitude is urgent, to overcome the indifference, and in spite of fears, to promote a generous attitude in welcoming those knocking at our doors.

**To protect:** It means a number of actions for the defense of the rights and the dignity of migrants as well as for the refugees, independently of their migratory status. To protect these brothers and sisters is a moral imperative being translated by adopting clear and pertinent judiciary instruments, both international and national.

**To promote:** It means to set up an environment where the migrants and the refugees, including their welcoming communities, can blossom according to all the human dimensions willed by the Creator. The human promotion of the migrants and their families starts from the communities of origin, where must be guaranteed, with the right to emigrate, as well as the right of not having to emigrate, that is to say the right to find in one's own country the conditions that will foster a dignified form of existence.

**To integrate:** That means the opportunity for an intercultural enrichment offered by the migrants. The integration is not the assimilation that will lead to suppress or forget one's own cultural identity. The contact with the other must, on the contrary, lead to the discovery of his "secret", and by being open to him, to accept what is valuable, and thus bring a better knowledge of one another.

Migration is a phenomenon not a problem. We cannot ignore the challenges but we can acknowledge the opportunities. The migrants and the refugees help us to renew our mission and the mission of our communities.

