



**HANDBOOKS**

**5**

# **MIGRATION IN THE LIGHT OF THE BIBLE**



Cover: Abraham at the oaks of Mamre (Catacombs on the Via Latina)

# MIGRATION IN THE LIGHT OF THE BIBLE

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## METHODOLOGY

### 1. Initial moment of recollection (prayer or singing)

### 2. Objectives of handbook N. 5:

- To participate in personal or group deepening on biblical themes related to migration.
- To provide the basis for specific studies for the Biblical dimension of the pastoral care of migrants.
- To include biblical-theological content for the formation of the laity working in the leadership of communities.
- To promote the culture of welcoming and including migrants and refugees in Christian communities.
- To introduce a biblical spirituality lived out in the acceptance and appreciation of differences.

### 3. Development of the booklet

This resource can be explored in one or more sessions, especially if you want to pay longer attention to one or another aspect.

### 4. The final part can revolve around the following issues:

- What is new in this study for me and my life? How does the Word of God enlighten my perception of the migratory phenomenon?
- What is my answer to God's appeals revealed in the migrant?
- What are the important elements for the welcome spirituality and for the pastoral care of migrants?
- How can we make welcoming migrants a part of our evangelization?

### 5. Further studies and research

A time of recollection or a visit to a significant place can be useful to the group.

### 6. Evaluation

Fill out the small form that is distributed

### 7. Conclusion with a prayer or a song

## I. INTRODUCTION

The experience of migration left a decisive impression in the way ancient Israel interpreted its relationship with God, with neighbor and with creation, as well as in the way of understanding its own identity. According to biblical narratives, the territory of Canaan would have been invaded and conquered several times. Two events, undoubtedly very significant, were the end of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC (2 Kgs 17,5-6) and the deportation of Judah to Babylon in 587 BC (2 Kgs 25,1-30).

In the siege of the Northern Kingdom, Assyria conquered the capital of Samaria and deported the people of Israel to territories of their domination, bringing other peoples to Israel/Galilee in order to dismantle the power of the landowners and maintain full control of the region (2 Kgs 17,5-6). On this occasion many Galileans managed to flee to Judah, living there as resident immigrants. Another key moment was the siege of Jerusalem and the invasion of the Assyrian king Sennacherib in 701 BC (2 Kgs 18,14), to which other sieges of Jerusalem followed in 598/597 and 588/587 BC, resulting in the destruction of the city and the temple of Jerusalem, and the deportation of the political and priestly elite to Babylon (2 Kgs 25:1-21), making Judah a province of the Babylonian Empire (2 Kgs 25:22-30). It is precisely in this context of migration, deportation and refuge and in confrontation with great empires (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome) that the Bible begins to be formalized from ancient traditions, some already written, others transmitted orally from father to son over generations (Ex 12:26-27; 13:7-8.14).

The importance of these experiences of migration, deportation and exile in the life and identity of God's people is confirmed in the amount of references to migrants and migration in the Bible (Ex 22:20; 23:9; Lv 19,34; 25,23; Dt 10.19; 1 Chr 29.15), including entire books in which central characters are migrants, like the second part of the book of Genesis (Gen 12-50), the books of Ruth, Esther, Jonah, as well as the Gospels of Matthew and Luke that present the profound solidarity and identification of Christ with migrants (Mt 25:35).

Starting, therefore, from the canonical perspective and from the biblical accounts, this handbook seeks to offer elements for reading, interpreting and understanding the importance and relevance on the theme of migration.

## II. PRESUPPOSITIONS FOR THE INTERPRETATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT FROM THE MIGRATION PERSPECTIVE

The Bible is a book written by migrants, for migrants and about migrants. This is not a redundant statement. Studies on the composition and writing of biblical texts indicate that much of the final text of the Old Testament was written during and after the exile in Babylon, in the IV

Century BC. Scholars and priests of ancient Israel would have collected ancient traditions and updated them through a contextual rereading, according to the experience that lived outside the promised land or under the jurisdiction of some foreign power, that is, Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome. In a biblical perspective, however, migration is not only a socio-political status, but a constitutive element of the identity as God's people.

Biblical texts do not merely speak and relate about migrants and migration, but do not merely refer to them for assistance purpose. In fact, the Bible gives prominence and visibility to the migrants, takes them out of anonymity, refers to them as people with a name and a story. The biblical narrator gives life and voice to migrants and those marginalized. It is not difficult to bring to mind that multitude of Egyptian refugees with whom God made a covenant and who became the chosen people (Ex 12,38); Agar, woman, foreign slave, refugee, single mother, expelled from the house of Abraham and Sarah, to whom God speaks and makes a promise similar to the promise of Abraham (Gen 16 and 21); Shiphrah and Puah, the foreign midwives who saved the lives of the newborn Hebrew children (Ex 1,15-22); Ruth, the Moabite immigrant, wife, widow, foreigner, who became David's great-grandmother; Esther, the poor foreign orphan girl, who becomes queen and the savior of her people; Jonah, the prophet called to proclaim God's judgment in a foreign land; Jeremiah's letter to exiles which motivated them to seek the peace (shalom) of the country of immigration (Jr 29.4-7.10;14).

In biblical accounts, migrants are not secondary, passive characters, objects of social action in the name of God; on the contrary, migrants are also protagonists of salvation; it was at the hands of Zipporah, a Medianite woman, that Moses was saved from death (Ex 4:24-26); it was through poor, sterile, foreign women that the word of God made its way to mankind (Gn 11,30; 25,21; 29,31; 1 Sm 1,5; 2,5; Jgs 13,2.3; Is 54,1), setting up his tent within mankind (Jn 1:14).

The Bible is not limited to talking about migrants or speaking for migrants. The Bible lets the migrants speak, raising their cry of pain and their victory song: "I heard their cry because of their suffering" (Ex 3:7) ... "and Miriam made them sing" (Ex 15:22-21). The cry of the migrant moves the heart of God, who cannot remain indifferent, impartial (Ex 3:8). The migrant is not the one who has nothing to offer, to teach; in fact, Ruth is presented as a model of loyalty to faith; regardless of her ethnic, religious, national identity (Ru 1,16-17).

In the Bible, migrant and migration is not just an idea, a dictionary word, a semantic element to be clarified in a literary perspective, or an adjunct among the characters of a biblical fiction narrative; but the human made in the image and likeness of God in a situation of vulnerability, for whom it is essential to do justice (Dt 10:17-19).

Without intending to be exhaustive, let us look at some paradigmatic examples of migration and migrants in biblical perspective.

## 1. MIGRATION AS AN ESCAPE FROM DEATH

*Text: Gn 11,25-12,4*

### **The textual context**

The news of the death of Haran (Gn 11,28), Terah youngest son, interrupts the natural cycle of life “grow and multiply” (Gn 1,28), which, in a way, is what happened (Gn 6:1–11,24), in addition to breaking the natural sequence of genealogies (Gn 11:10-28), represented by the continuous succession of procreations and generations reported in the preceding genealogical lists. The impossibility of continuing the generation of life is aggravated by the news of the sterility of Sarah, wife of Abraham, the eldest son of Terah, and who until then had no children (Gen 11:30).

Without other justifications, the narrator reports Terah’s decision to gather his family and his possessions and leave from Ur of the Chaldeans to the land of Canaan. Halfway through the journey, however, those fleeing death end up dying. Terah dies in Haran (Gn 11:35). At this crucial moment in Abram’s life, surrounded by signs of death, the God of life presents him with a new project and a prosperous and blessed future. (Gn 12:1-4).

Although the migration of Terah’s family can be inserted in a sociological and historical scenario of peoples’ movement, characteristic of the ancient east, it turns out that the narrative of the migration of Abram, Sara and Lot, as well as all the other patriarchs and matriarchs of ancient Israel served, specifically, the religious argument to justify it as part of a divine plan, in which God himself assumes the authorship of migration (Gn 15:7). As a result of this authorship assumed by God the migration is now interpreted as a fundamental theological category for the economy of the Old and New Testaments. Migration is no longer interpreted only as a social fact and, in the light of faith, it becomes understood as part of a divine plan by which God promises posterity, land, and blessings (Gn 12,1-4; 15,7).

## 2. MIGRATION IS A JOURNEY WITH NO RETURN

*Text: Gn 12,5-25,11*

### **The textual context**

Abram and Sarah continue their journey relying on the promises of God, they cross from north to south the promised land, entering by Shechem and continuing to Bethel and to the Negeb (Gn 12,6.8.9), then descend to Egypt (Gn 12:10-20). From Egypt they return in Bethel (Gn 13:3-4), before they dwelt near the oaks of Mamre, near Hebron (Gn 13,18). Later they are found again in the Negeb (Gn 20,1-18), then in

Berrsheba (Gn 21:32-33; 22:19). Sarah, however, dies and is buried in Hebron (Gn 23.2).

Abraham and Sarah are prototypes of migrants who leave permanently the country of origin in the hope of reaching the promised land (Gn 11:31; 15,7; Ne 9,7; Jos 24:2-3), where they will be able to generate and educate their children and prosper, recounting God's blessing and protection. In the country of immigration, Abram and Sarah roam the land sustained by the promises of God, but they also face two experiences of hunger (Gn 12:10), threats from the inhabitants of the country (Gn 12:18-10; 20,9-13), family separations (Gn 13), more situations (Gn 14), social and economic injustices (Gn 21:22-32) and death (Gn 19; 22 and 23). For Abram's family and Sarah the migration is a journey with no return, geographical, human and spiritual. But God remains faithful and keeps his promises. Although Sarai was sterile (Gn 11, 30), she gave birth to a son for Abram (Gn 21:1-4). On the occasion of Sarah's death, Abram managed to buy a field with a cave (Gn 23,1-20) and both were blessed (Gn 12,17; 17,16; 20,1-18).

### 3. MIGRATION IN SEARCH OF SHELTER AND THE DREAM OF RETURNING

*Text: Gn 27,41-46.*

#### **The textual context**

Jacob can be presented as a prototype of the migrant refugee. He comes out of his land because his brother threatened to kill him (Gn 27:41-45; 28.1-3). It is during the escape that he comes to know God through a dream, so a natural event gains a supernatural dimension.

God introduces himself to Jacob and assures him of his companionship, guidance, and protection (Gn 28). Jacob continues his escape to his mother's homeland, in the house of the maternal uncle, who will come to be his father-in-law. During his twenty years in Padam Haram, in Laban's house, Jacob lived misadventures and joys as a refugee in search of protection, conditioned by his situation (Gn 29.1-30.1), such as the servile and unappreciated work, and in conflict with his brothers-in-law and his own father-in-law. In the face of continued threats in the country of refuge, God reveals to Jacob that it is time to return to his father's house, in his homeland (Gn 31:3). Jacob flees, taking with him his family and his possessions.

During his escape, Jacob was also pursued (Gen 31:22-42), set up borders and entered into peace agreements (Gn 31:42-54), experienced fear (Gen 32:4-22; 33:1-4), he fought with God and with men (Gen 32,23-33), had his only daughter raped and kidnapped (Gen 34) and saw his children kill many people in Shechem, and was forced to flee again (Gen 34:25-31). On the run through Bethel, his beloved wife died and she was buried (Gen 35:19) after giving birth to one more son (Gen 35:18). To-



gether with his family he suffered extreme hunger due to a prolonged period of drought, and was forced to migrate to survive (Gen 42,1-3; 43,1-2).

The life of Jacob and his family could be tragic if it were not for his faith (Gen 31,3; 46,1-4). With God's blessing, Jacob came in peace in his homeland, in time to reconcile with his brother and bury his father (Gen 35:27-29). Jacob spends twenty years in Haran, that is, in Mesopotamia, and ends his life in Egypt, but will be buried in the promised land together with his ancestors (Gen 50:1-13). In the same tomb with Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebeca, Jacob and Lia (Gen 49:31).

Jacob is a paradigm of the migrant who departs with the dream of returning, symbol of cunning, which includes the ethics of traveling, of what is transitory and of adapting to adverse circumstances (Gen 31:4-13).

#### 4. IMMIGRANT OR NATIVE: "ALL ARE EQUAL BEFORE THE LAW"

*Texts: The Decalogue (Ex 20,2-17 and Dt 5,6-21); The Code of the Covenant (Ex 20,22-23,19); Law of Holiness (Lev 17-26); Deuteronomic Code (Dt 12-26).*

##### **The textual context**

In the Bible it is possible to find several legislative texts and narrations which confirm the fundamental principle of equality between all members of the human race. Certainly, there are other texts that confirm Israel's superiority over other nations (Det 26:19; 28:1), however, such statements are due to Israel's own mission of being a light to the nations, a blessing to the peoples and families of the earth (Lev 19:2).

In such a way, among these texts it is possible to discover fundamental values for a fair and inclusive society.

Among the legislative codes of Ancient Israel (Covenant code: Ex 20,22-23,19; Law of Holiness: Lv 17-26; Deuteronomic Code: Dt 12-26), in relation to the immigrant, the book of Exodus offers at least seven texts in favor of legislative equality between immigrants and natives<sup>1</sup>, including authorizing the immigrant to participate in the Passover in the same way as the native (Ex 12,19.48.49). Four of these passages are entered in the Code of the covenant (Ex 20.10; 22.20; 23,9.13). The Law of Holiness brings at least sixteen articles that treat the immigrant as people of the land<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, the commandment of love for neighbor identifies neighbor as an immigrant (Lv 19.34; Dt 10.19). Likewise, the book of Numbers has nine passages upholding the validity of the law for both the native and the immigrant<sup>3</sup>. The book of Deuteronomy con-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Ex 12,19.48.49; 18,2;20,10; 22,20; 23,9.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Lv 16,29; 17,8.10.12.13.15; 18,26; 19,10.33.34; 20,2; 22,18; 23,33; 24,16.22.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Nm 9,14;15,14.15.16.26.29.30; 19,10; 35,15.

tains several immigrant-friendly descriptions and, in its laws, includes it in the social triad: the immigrant, the orphan and the widow<sup>4</sup>, emphasizing that God loves the immigrant, providing him with his needs, and gives Israel the commandment to love the immigrant.

“For the Lord your God, who is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, powerful God, terrible God, a God to be feared, who makes no preference of persons and does not accept bribes, does justice to the orphan and the widow, loves the immigrant by giving him bread, and therefore you will love the immigrant, for you were immigrants yourselves in the land of Egypt” (Dt 10:17-19).

In these passages, God’s voice translates his love and his care for the immigrant into a law. In the Deuteronomic Code (Dt 5; 12–26), the orphan, the widow and the immigrant are the beneficiaries of fourteen laws of assistance, protection, promotion and social integration of the migrant, with reference to the right to weekly rest (Dt 5,14), sacrifices (Dt 12,7.12), annual tithing and first-borns (Dt 12, 18; 14,26-27), triennial tithing (Dt 14,29), to the offering of the firstborn (Dt 15,20); to the feasts of Pentecost (Dt 16,11) and of Booths (Dt 16:14), to gleaning during harvest (Dt 24:19), to gathering harvest left behind (Dt 24, 20,21), to first fruits (Dt 26,11) and again to triennial tithing (Dt 26,12-13). The Deuteronomic Code is a set of organic, logical and complete laws that indicate the way to a society without impoverished and excluded people, alternative and caring, projecting the possibility of a new and different world.

Thus: “God does justice to the orphan and the widow, loves the immigrant by giving him bread and clothes” (Dt 10,18). It is not enough, however, to be fair to the immigrant, assuring him the minimum to survive, one must love him (Dt 10,19), because love is the guarantee of the identity of the immigrant as a human person created in the image of God (Gn 1, 26-27). More than social benefits, any immigrant, regardless of ethnicity, color or religion, needs respect, welcome, solidarity, recognition, empathy and opportunity, so God vehemently appeals to ancient Israel to recognize and not transgress the rights of migrants:

“You will not deprive the migrants (resident alien), the orphan of justice; nor shall you use a widow’s clothes as a pledge.” (Dt 24,17)

“Cursed be anyone who deprives the (resident alien) immigrant, the orphan and the widow of justice!” and all the people shall answer, “Amen!” (Dt 27,19)

“You will not afflict the migrant, nor oppress him; for you were once aliens in the land of Egypt.” (Ex 22, 21)

“You will not oppress the migrant either; because you know the heart of the migrant” (Ex 23:9)

“And when the migrant resides with you in your land, do not mistreat such a one.” (Lv 19.33).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Dt 10,18; 14,29; 16,11.14; 24,19.20.21; 26,12.13; 27,19.

For ancient Israel retaining the memory of its original status as a migrant, it is essential for a just relationship with the land and with the migrants who live there. Migration is an experience that cannot be forgotten or neglected: “Because you were a migrant in Egypt” (Ex 22,20; 23,9; Lv 19.34; 25,23; Dt 10.19; 1 Chr 29:15). Consequently, Israel must do to the migrants what he would like to be done to him. “Remember that you were a slave in Egypt” (Dt 5:15; 15:15; 16:12; 24,18. 22) is an appeal not to forget God’s liberating action, for the experience of migration and slavery has an ethical-moral implication: “You shall not molest the migrant, nor oppress him, because you yourself were an immigrant in the land of Egypt” (Ex 22,20).

### III. THE WORLD BEFORE THE TEXT

Since time past, migration is a connatural process in the lives of individuals or groups and tends to continue in the future because there are no limits to human longing for better days. For this same reason, there are those who define the human species as “migratory species”<sup>5</sup>.

Nowadays, migratory movements are one of the most relevant phenomena, despite tensions with the opening and the closing of borders, respect for cultural diversities and acts of extreme intolerance, movements in defense of human rights on the one hand and slavery of people on the other, high level of scientific technological development and whole peoples living in extreme poverty. Migrants are mostly the result or the victims of these and other social, religious or political tensions<sup>6</sup>.

Human movements, however, represent opportunities for encounters, communion, exchanges, diversity, creativity, the exercise of universal brotherhood, solidarity, as well as the practice of justice and respect for the dignity proper to the human being. More than a number of displaced people in geographical space, migrations represent a movement of people with an individual identity, cultures, ideas, intelligence, values, policies, religions, concepts and social practices.

The complexity of the migratory phenomenon is determined by dynamics of globalization, systems of totalitarian governments, natural accidents, prolonged periods of drought, civil wars, terrorist movements, but also by phenomena related to religious experience, secularization, religious relativism, the proliferation of new beliefs, the ever-greater presence of believers of different religious denominations seeking asylum in countries of mostly Christian tradition.

In this sense, the world scenario gains an ever more colorful, multicultural and multireligious composition, which confirms the relevance of

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator*. Paris: Aubier, Motaigue Editions, 1945.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. UNHCR, *Global Trends*. Available in <http://www.unhcr.org/statistics/unhcrstats/5943e8a34/global-trends-forced-displacement-2016.html> Access on 20.04.2020

the fundamental question, that is, “the question of God” and the relevance of Biblical-theological research that can shed new lights for a more inclusive pastoral action.

The question of God in the life of the migrant is undoubtedly essential and existential. Only those who knew the unspeakable harshness of the journey can tell where the presence that led them came from and made it possible for them resist the countless sufferings, persecutions, dangers of death, hunger and thirst in the desert, the testing of their strength and physical and moral abuses; and nevertheless continue to dream of a land that guarantees peace and bread. Likewise, it is possible to affirm that the issue of the migrant has paramount and great relevance in the Judeo-Christian Holy Scriptures. God loves the migrant, protects, accompanies and gives him clothes and bread (Dt 10:18). The God of Israel reveals himself to be a migrant with the migrants, for he arms his tent and descends to dwell and walk with his people in the desert crossing (Ex 40:34-38).

#### **IV. QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL AND GROUP REFLECTION**

- Do I know migration stories or experiences as a quest for survival?
- How does the Bible migration experience clarify my understanding of the current phenomenon of migration?
- Why did God choose a migrant people to make a covenant?
- Why does God love and protect migrants?
- In what sense are migrants and migration the announcement of a new heaven and a new earth?

#### **V. PRESUPPOSITIONS FOR THE INTERPRETATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT FROM THE MIGRATION PERSPECTIVE**

The texts of the New Testament are pillars that help to build a Church wherein no one feels like a foreigner: meaning that, “through the Gospel, non-Jews are equally heirs with Israel, members of the same body and co-participants of the promise in Christ Jesus”, the migrants likewise “are no longer strangers and pilgrims, but fellow citizens with the saints, and you are of the family of God” (Eph 3:6,19).

In the New Testament, several texts present Jesus in dialogue with “foreigners”: the Siro- Phoenician woman (Mt 7); the Samaritan (Jn 5); the centurion of Cafarnaum (Lk 7:1-10; Mt 8.5-13); Mary of Magdala (Jn 20). Jesus’ actions, in a multicultural society, are in and of themselves

suggestions for pastoral service with migrants: to promote dialogues that make possible coexistence between the various cultural expressions, leave “dogmatic” security to meet the other, welcome him, listen to him and interact with him.

In the context of religious and cultural pluralism, dialogue enables knowledge and mutual enrichment, overcoming the borders of ignorance, intolerance, prejudice. Dialogue means to know and respect the other as a person, his/her values and convictions, without necessarily giving up one’s own identity, culture or faith. Dialogue is a privileged space where hearts open to welcome and share the Word of God, as an announcement of the victory of love over hatred, of life over death.

Without intending to exhaust this issue, let’s look at some paradigmatic examples of migration and migrants from the New Testament’s perspective.

## 1. IT WAS JESUS!

*Text: Mt 25,31-46.*

### **The textual context**

Jesus dwelt in the region of Galilee, went through the experience of migration (Mt 2) and lived as a pilgrim (Mt 8:20). The Evangelist John accentuates the dimension of his strangeness because He came “from above” (Jn 8:23), even though in Jesus’ words this identification appears only once.

According to the Evangelist Matthew, Jesus gives his disciples his last instruction in the form of a dialogue and it deals with future judgment. All people will be judged on the criteria of the works of love, which are actually numbered four times.

Those examined will be surprised above all by a fact: before the need of another person, what was at stake was his/her relationship with the “Son of Man.” Only when the choices become irreversible there is awareness of its implications, the discovery that humanity is the very place of the mysterious presence of the Lord.

If God who became man is the great newness of the faith of the New Testament, this message brings us a “revolution”: God incarnates himself to the point of identifying himself with the “little ones” (vv. 40.45), among whom the foreigner is mentioned always in third place. It’s a significant placement, right after those who experience the most elementary needs for survival, hunger and thirst.

The discourse of universal judgment also reveals facts of the earthly path of Christ: not only was he hungry (Mt 21:18; cf. 12:1) or something happened to him worse than prison in his passion, but he also experienced the denial of hospitality (Lk 9:51-56). “I was a foreigner and you welcomed me” (Mt 25:35). The Gospel testimony puts us in a privileged

position in relation to those listeners of Jesus. We cannot claim ignorance, for we know what the criteria are for evaluating our lives. These also concern our reactions to the foreigner.

### **The challenges of the text**

– Jesus questions us in our capacity to welcome the migrant, which translates into gestures of hospitality. Eloquent speeches or intentions are empty and sterile if not accompanied by goodwill and sensitivity for the other (Mt 7,21-24).

– The real welcome is to allow the other to find space in my life. For speaking a language that is not mine, for having other traditions and even another religion, the migrant challenges some certainties, and I can shield myself... Listening to him is fundamental, because in this way I do not offer things, but I give him the gift of myself (Lk 10:38-42).

– The Christian reaches the highest level of acceptance by realizing that in the other person is Christ himself (Mt 10:40-42). Our interpersonal relationships are opportunities to live a vertical relationship with God himself (Heb 13:2).

## **2. IN PRAISE OF THE MIGRANT**

*Text: Lc 17,11-19*

### **The textual context**

Jesus performed various exorcisms and symbolic actions, but what most impressed his contemporaries were the miracles. And among the many who are favored, several are foreigners, such as the Siro-Phoenician woman (Mk 7, Mt 15) or the centurion of Capernaum (Mt 8, Lk 7). One of them, however, as we read in our text, reacts in a singular way: he was a Samaritan leper.

In biblical language, the disease called “leprosy” indicated a generic skin disease, often contagious and disgusting, and it also figured as a divine punishment (Nm 12:10-15). For this reason, the leper was considered unclean and, according to the law, when someone was approaching, he had to cry out, “Unclean, unclean!” (Lv 13.45).

Yet it was quite another cry that the ten lepers addressed to Jesus: “Master, have mercy on us!” Marginalized from society and separated even from God, they joined in the call for help.

That disease could cause them loss of sense of touch, but they had an even greater sensitivity: they perceived the presence of Jesus and his Power.

As they began to execute Jesus’ request, they were soon healed without need for ablutions or other rites. Suddenly one of them came back to thank and we then learned that it was a Samaritan, as Jesus observes, a “foreigner”.

Although the Samaritans were related to the Jews, from a religious point of view they were considered heretics and treated as pagans. It is admirable that this man reacted with attitudes typical of the “Just Jew”: praise, prostration and thanksgiving. It therefore reveals that it has a higher faith. So much so that Jesus attributes the healing to the Samaritan’s faith.

### **The challenges of the text**

- Jesus treated the lepers without distinction. We are easily led to preferences or interests: affective, economic, cultural... (Tg 2:1-5). We distribute opportunities unevenly, ignoring that, especially in pain, it is always the same humanity crying out for our solidarity.

- In praising the Samaritan (and there are other relevant cases, such as that of the centurion mentioned above), Jesus teaches to share the good deed done by the other. In the face of so many initiatives – including policies and media – which foster prejudice and marginalize migrants, Christians are called to expose what is positive about migration.

- Healed, purified and saved, the Samaritan is sent by Jesus. There are people who, just because they have crossed the border, feel that their dignity is degraded (Gal 3.28). They also need to hear the word “Rise”, which could mean: work, communicate in the local language, be legalized, enjoy the presence of the family...

## **3. REVOLUTIONIZING THE MISSIONARY PROJECT**

*Text: At 10,1-11,18*

### **The textual context**

Throughout the book of the Acts of the Apostles, an episode stands out that narrates a decisive step in the history of the Church: the entry of non-Jews in the people of salvation. Guided by the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Peter baptizes a pagan. It is Jesus’ program (Acts 1:8) that is taking place in history.

This narration occupies considerable space in the book of Acts, a sign of its importance to the early Church and its paradigmatic value for us.

Peter is introduced at the beginning of his missionary activity outside Jerusalem, still close to the coast of Judea. In this region there was a Roman centurion named Cornelius who, even though a pagan, is portrayed as righteous before God.

It is in this context that the Lord manifests himself in order to guide them to the encounter. Cornelius does not hesitate to accept the sign of God, while Peter is perplexed to be invited to eat animals considered impure by the Jews. By overcoming a food taboo, the horizon of full communion is opened up.

“You know that it is unlawful for a Jewish man to associate with, or visit, a Gentile, but God has shown me that I should not call any person profane or unclean” (10:28), Peter said.

His presence with Cornelius precedes an even more determining factor: The Holy Spirit, the protagonist of the narration, descends to demolish the barrier between Jews and pagans. And not only comes upon Peter or Cornelius, but “upon all the hearers of the Word.” The pagans then receive baptism, a sign of incorporation into the community.

### **Challenges of the text**

– Luke reported not so much the attitude of an individual (Peter), but the openness of the Church itself to foreigners. It makes us think that there can be parish structures and pastoral strategies that do not consider migrants, making them feel foreign in the Church itself (Eph 2,19).

– Peter had to convert to enter the house of a pagan. There are migrants who live in solitude and find themselves discouraged, disoriented, or even desperate. They may not even know we exist, but how much good we could do to them if we moved out of our comfort zones (Jn 10:16).

– This episode will end with the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15), when the Church will officially open herself to non-Jews. It will be a path of tensions and resistance, but walked in dialogue and enlightened by the Spirit. Divisions in our groups hurt our testimony and harm our openness; as long as they persist, we cannot be resigned to them (1 Cor 1.10).

## **4. OUR PRESENT CONDITION**

*Text: First Letter from Peter (1Pt)*

### **Context**

The coming of Christ abolished the walls that divide men from each other, now anyone is called to build up the Church (Eph 2:11-22). However, this is a reality still under construction since the Christians’ citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3:20). Peter’s First Letter is the Bible book that most emphasizes our condition of instability in this world. The author knows the situation of the faithful of Asia Minor, oppressed and even persecuted by the pagans. The theme of the suffering of the baptized is strongly emphasized: instead of causing sorrow, their suffering should be cause for rejoicing, an opportunity to participate in the sufferings of Christ (4,13-14).

In fact, those Christians, besides being a group with few resources and a minority among pagans, as adherents of the new religion were living in tension with the surrounding world. This is why Peter describes the condition of his readers with the expression “foreigners and strangers” (2,11). In Greek, the language of the New Testament, the first term is *pároikos*, from which the word “parish” derives. It meant “neighbor”



and later went on to indicate the “foreign resident”, someone who, even if not a citizen, enjoyed some legal protection. The second term (parepidemos) describes the person who does not have stable residence, does not belong to the people and, therefore, has no recognized legal condition. These words, more than having a political or legal connotation, evoke the description of the patriarchs in the Old Testament, they are a reminder that Israel is a people of emigrants.

We Christians seek a future homeland. Our condition of “migrants” is to recognize that, at the present moment, we must undergo a crisis, being “strangers” in the world, while destined to participate in the glory of Christ. We are given not a promised land, but rather an inheritance in heaven. We may even be marginalized in the face of the world, but before God we are elected (1:2-4).

### **Challenges of the text**

- The word “parish” contemplates the meaning of “neighborhood” and is related to the concept of “foreigner, guest” (pároikos). It is a transitory reality, we are a pilgrim Church and we must overcome temptations of accumulation and stagnation, always in search of new horizons. Our first brothers in the faith, even before they were called “Christians” (Acts 11:26), they were recognized as those “of the Way” (Acts 9:2; Jn 14:6).

- The term “migrant” acquires existential connotation in 1Pt and is useful to describe the Christian experience. The awareness that we are not of this world is a privileged route of solidarity with the migrant (Jn 15,19).

- “Migrant” distinguishes the disciple of Christ, who is heir to a hope, as Peter teaches. We must witness our hope to migrants, help them interpret their own history in the light of the experience of faith (Lk 24:13-35).

## **VI. QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL AND GROUP REFLECTION**

- In what way is the migrant part of my life as a person, and not just as a favored person?
- Do we help to overcome the losses that migrants suffer by communicating what is good about this reality?
- Peter’s gesture in favor of Cornelius evokes Pope Francis’ aspiration of a “Church on the way out”. How do we carry out this mission in a migration context?
- Teamwork is a visible sign of our capacity to welcome, to practice what we preach. As a group of Scalabrinian laity, what witness do we give to unity and dialog?

## VII. Bibliografia per un approfondimento personale

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