

MIGRANTS' SUNDAY - - - 2014

+ Gaudencio B. Cardinal Rosales
Archbishop-Emeritus of Manila

Today the Church celebrates Seafarers and Migrants' Sunday closest to the Feast day of San Lorenzo Ruiz, the first Pilipino Saint who was himself a migrant, seeking sanctuary in Formosa Island, now better known as Taiwan. But that is going ahead of the story, because he eventually had to move on to Japan where he was later asked to give up his life in loyal affirmation of his Christian faith. Celebrating Migration Sunday means that the Church recognizes a present day phenomenon of hundreds of millions of people transiting here and there, criss-crossing the globe thru the continents for reasons only the people on the move knows. There is a reason for every migrant daring to relocate in another country, among different people and culture.

Jesus Himself was a migrant. "The angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother with you, and escape into Egypt, and stay there until I tell you, because Herod intends to search for the child and do away with him. And so Joseph got up, and taking the child and his mother and left that night for Egypt". (Matt. 2: 13-14). The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph instantly became a family of migrants by Divine providence in order to save the life of the Child. Millions of people today join the exodus from their homeland seeking the secured future of more millions of families; and the reasons can be economic, social, political, ethnic or cultural.

Exciting changes await the migrants whether s/he is a transitional or permanent migrant; and the changes appear to be immediately rewarding especially when the pay check begins to enlarge the purse and add more food at the dinner table. New friends and environs add colour to the new life and partnership. Moreover, the transfer to an adopted land, new work, to a different way of relaxation, all these exact a big cost to the old traditional values and customs of the new transferees. Unfortunately the ill prepared migrant will lose more of the treasured values of his/her native culture.

Many are the reasons why people move on to different locations even within their own country (internal migration) or to dare cross the seas (international migration) to discover a better future for their families. Some move on for social, political, ethnic or economic reasons. But basically people

decide to change residences because of a need for closer friendly and brotherly ties found only in love. All people look for kindness, long for understanding, justice, union and sharing. In extreme cases what the immediate surroundings can offer is “failed fraternal ties”. And this situation exists when closer friendship, trust and compassion are not available in the neighbourhood of work, home or society / community. Quoting from Paul VI’s *Populorum Progression*, Pope Benedict XVI states that “the weakening of brotherly ties between individuals and nations is a profound cause of underdevelopment and has a major impact on the migration phenomenon”. (Benedict XVI, Migration Sunday, September, 2010).

What Pope-Emeritus Benedict XVI was assuming to say was that what people could not enjoy or find in their homeland, they would hopefully discover among other people benefiting from the values of a different culture, surprisingly different from their own native breeding and tradition. And the risk for making such a decisive migratory step goes beyond the uncertain, the untraveled path and onward to a possible collision with much of the treasured homeland traditions and customs.

What are those yet uncalculated risks in such a drastic change for the person and the family? This could be explained by an experience I once had when an Irish American pastor in the West coast (USA) invited me to offer the Sunday Mass his Parish. The mid-morning Sunday Mass congregation was surprisingly attended by a congregation that was nearly half Pilipino attendees. As the congregation made their way to the parking lot after Mass, the pastor pointed out the teenage youth minding the children and the elders were helped to the cars, while the glee mixed with humour resounded from the parked cars. The Pastor told me, “Bishop, send an elderly Pilipino priest who understands the preserved value of a well knit family to assist these Pilipino migrants. Or else, in less than a generation’s time, these beautiful family traditions could be lost”.

There are imperative tasks for the migrating people if they were forever to be linked with their motherland and traditions. Faith in and love for God as they have known Him in Jesus Christ, if they are Christians. A Christian migrant is not away from home only to make good money. He or she is already committed to Christ’s (the Christian way of life); wherever he is, he must shine before men, so that seeing his good works, others may give praise to the Father in heaven. (Matthew 5: 16). Evangelization is inevitably linked to witness. The way a person lives puts at stake what he believes.

“The person who has been evangelized goes on to evangelize others. Here lies the test of truth, the touchstone of evangelization. It is unthinkable that a person should accept the Word and give himself to the kingdom without becoming a person who bears witness to it and proclaims it in his turn”. (E.N., 24). All things considered equal, there must be a difference between work done by person who knows and is committed to Jesus Christ and a job that is done by someone who does not know Jesus: not perhaps in the job finished, but in the way the item was done: with love, with passion or spiritual motivation. Just remember this, even if the issue or matter is only between you and Him or between you and the rest, Jesus always makes the difference.

The Christian migrant does not forget to pray because in prayer s/he reaches out to God from the depths of heart where needs are expressed as desire, where good is spelled as love. In a very beautiful way, for the worker at the end of a very busy day, prayer becomes “a memory of God”. All the noise and the attention at the factory or shop encountered during the working day drains an individual of all consciousness about God. But when he prays at the end of the day, the memory of God returns. What a beautiful ending of a busy day when God the Giver of all is remembered/recalled.

The family as the seat of drilled values accompanies the migrant worker as reason for his hard work, perseverance and more hard work. The deep seated reverence for elders, love for life and children, sharing at the level of generous giving, sacrifice for the future and the gift of joy and music underlined by hope are the values linked with the Pilipino Family that every Christian migrant stand for.

As in many Asian cultures it is in the Pilipino tradition that the family is held as a privileged community where different generations and ages meet to share shelter, food and above all the wisdom of the elders to give assurance and guidance to the young. (G. S., 52). And it was no surprise to many that the social gatherings and feast day celebrations even the celebration of national holidays converge on the family.

On the other hand there are the migrant worker’s obligations to the welcoming host country; they need to remember that they are only guests of the host country. Enjoy and be grateful for the welcome, but obey the laws and respect the traditions and customs of the hosts. “Immigrants have the duty to integrate into the host country, respecting the laws and its national

identity". (Migration Sunday, September, 2010). As a sign of friendship and unity, the migrants are not to build ghettos that symbolize class and division, but they should blend with the locals and residents as one of them appreciating what is offered and respecting native tradition, practices and customs. They know better what is good for them, respect them.

The wonderful gift of migration is that we wake up to find that we have new neighbours, eating the same food, working in same shops and singing the same songs. Migration heightens fraternity among humans. Thank God for people on the move among us.