

# Brothers and sisters all

By Andrew Hamilton SJ

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**As we mark Migrant and Refugee Sunday on 29 September, we need to keep in mind that the task of Christians is to walk with our brothers and sisters in company with Christ.**

In Australia, **as in many other nations** today, many people are hostile to refugees and to migrants. That is not surprising. People who struggle to find accommodation or to keep work can easily be led to see people coming to Australia as threats. They believe that governments should solve local problems first and only then admit others to Australia. Such opinions may not make economic sense and be self-centred, but they are understandable.

Less understandable and forgivable is the conduct of politicians and ideologues who fish with dynamite in troubled waters by spreading false rumours against people from other cultures, stir up violent demonstrations, and depict refugees and immigrants from unfavoured nations as dangerous people who should be locked up. They use contemptuous words as brands with which to mark people from overseas as less than human. In Great Britain and in Europe we have seen how dangerous this behaviour is, how it can be inflamed by politicians and by social media, and how it threatens peace and civil order.

## **REACH OUT**

In these times there is little point in entering arguments about refugees. We do better to reach out to come to know and to help them. We can keep in our hearts all the persons who are doing it hard, and not to lump them together in groups in which they are treated as things and not as persons. It is right to reflect on the hardships which many people who live in Australia must bear, to feel compassion for them, and to argue for change in our unequal economy. That should then help us to open our hearts to the stories of people who have been forced from their homes and who seek protection and a new life in Australia.

Australians doing it hard, and refugees and immigrants are not competitors but are all our brothers and sisters.

In his 2024 message for Migrant and Refugee Sunday Pope Francis emphasises our link as Catholic Christians with people forced to leave their home country. He draws out the connections between the pleading for refugees that has marked his time as Pope and his promotion of synodality. Both flow from and encourage discernment at every level of the Catholic Church, which will then lead to practical ways of going out to live the Gospel.

## **PILGRIM JOURNEY**

In his message he develops the links between the Gospel, the Church and people forced to leave their homes. He describes the Church as on a pilgrim journey towards the Kingdom of God, following that of Jesus, who in his life, death and rising recapitulated the journey of the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt to the promised land. In these pilgrim journeys God walked with the Jewish people, with Jesus and with the Church. Through the Church Christ now walks with people who are homeless to help them find a home.

The task of Christians is to walk with our brothers and sisters in company with Christ. At a deep level we are all migrants and refugees. Our heart then belongs to our brothers and sisters who are forced to travel into strange lands.

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