

Lecture C: Refugees in the light of Laudato Si and the Year of Mercy by H.E. Mons Santo Marciano, Archbishop of the Military Ordinariate of Italy

1. Intro and greeting

2. “Nothing in this world is the result of indifference”¹

The words that Pope Francis used in opening “Laudato Si” amply encompass the whole encyclical in the theme “Ecology of the environment and of humans” and is developed as an emergency for the contemporary world as a “common home”.² I would like to include in this common concern for our common home our stated topic: the reality of refugees in the light of Laudato Si and the year of mercy.

This reflection is important for AMI who are called, as St. John Paul II 30 said years ago, to a specific pastoral understanding of (issues) that confront military in their duty to act among risks and the necessity of a looking deeply into the ethical questions inherent in their profession.³

This is a reflection on a series of choices between acceptance and refusal, helping or abandoning, building bridges or walls, in a word, between indifference and mercy—which one could say is between death and life.

3. A choice between death and life.

To understand the essence of the problem of refugees, which I will naturally do from the point of view of Italy, we need to begin with the number of dead which provoked this emergency. The Italian Coast Guard recovered 272 bodies in 2015, and 160 so far in 2016. These are the official numbers, but the Foundation for Migrants estimates that the total dead in 2015, many of whose bodies were never recovered from the Mediterranean, as more than 3200 persons including 700 children—compared to about 1600 in 2014⁴

4. Rescued:

On the other hand, the number that reached Italy in 2015 was 153,018 (a 9% drop from the 170,011 in 2014: more that the total of the last 23 years.⁵ So far in 2016 we have 118,903 (more than 718,000 since 1991) persons fleeing from war and suffering, most of these women and children.

5. From “throw away” to responsibility

The alternative between life and death mirrors the struggle with a “throw away” culture which we read about in Laudato Si, significantly complicating human life by the rapid pace and expansion (globalization).⁶ Discarding refugees is not only an issue of borders, but of a culture that divides between rich and poor, strong and weak, consequences of all (kinds of) injustices and discrimination—and against creation.

“The tragic increase in migrants that flee misery, aggravated by a degrading ambient in which they are not recognized as refugees by international conventions and carry the weight of being abandoned without any rights,... the lack of reaction to this drama affecting our brothers and sisters is a sign of the loss of that sense of responsibility for our equals which is the basis of all civilized society.⁷ In this denunciation by Pope Francis, the word “responsibility” resounds in all its clarity. It is an unattested responsibility, toward mankind and the world, toward justice and peace, which has permitted and continues to permit the refugee emergency.

6. The Italian military called to responsibility

Because of this, in Italy up to 31 December 2015, a total of 103792 strangers have been helped in hospitals and other structures.⁸ This is a responsibility assumed primarily by the Italian military and civil (service) forces: Navy, Air Force, Police, Carabinieri, Finance Guards-- coordinated by the Coast Guard and in collaboration with other non-governmental agencies. The military organized these together to do more than one agency could do alone. On the other hand, the military have a primary mission of defending the land, and have to work within the limits imposed by laws and international accords.

7. Custody of people is not confinement.

In this military “responsibility” there is a foggy conglomeration, a “new profile” consisting of protection of one’s citizens, help to strangers, and balancing the needs and resources. Having custody of a country and those arriving in it means defending it, not confining it—much less the persons in it. Besides all the helping operations, let us consider also those who defend against criminal organizations that operate in international ‘cracks’ (underlaps), a phenomenon often denounced by the Holy Father. This international competence to collaborate (against crime) can use increasingly better refined technology in the service and advantage of human life.

8. Common Home

But another responsibility emerges in international politics: the sense of divisions between various countries. The president of Italy recently affirmed that “it is illusory to think that the phenomenon of migration can be solved by a cartel with a sign: no entry.” In Europe, no country can think only of itself. We help each other, able to govern securely only with the principle that (secure government) can only be realized with others. Who can talk of an increase in possibility of work and living well in one country where persons have little or nothing, because concretely their common good coincides fully in our own?⁹

There is a second perspective: cure for people is totally one with the cure of the earth, the common home, with the comprehension that we are one human family and there are frontiers and political and social barriers that permit us to isolate ourselves.¹⁰ This Pope Francis affirms throughout *Laudato Si*.

9. What will happen to you, Europe?

But the cries are strong against the “old continent.” What will happen to you, humanistic Europe, exemplar of human rights, of democracy and liberty? What will happen to you, Europe mother of peoples and nations, mother of great men and women who have thought to defend and give life through the dignity of their brothers?¹¹ A cry against those who do not hear “the cries of sister earth, which unite with the cries of the abandoned of the world, with a lament that claims from us an other judgement.”¹²

10. A dream concerning the church

A cry that makes a dream “Dream of a Europe that takes care of its children, that helps like a brother the poor that arrive seeking acceptance because they have nothing and need repair,” Francis confesses. “I dream of a Europe in which to be a migrant is not a loss of good but a greater duty with the dignity of all that being human means.”¹³ We the church, the church of Europe, feel that that dream is ours, our true and proper calling. And the church cannot remain silent about this human emergency, even more so the church within the military has to feel noticed. The pastoral reception of the refugees brings to light a new, vast and enthusiastic field for evangelization and charity for AMI, attending to announcing the gospel and the promotion of peace.

As church, we are above all called to identify and confront with decision to all those present, the tears we find in a discriminatory and xenophobic mentality that makes our sea an extermination camp. And we are called to remember, together with the pope, that Europe, aided by its grand cultural and religious patrimony, has the tools to defend the centrality of the human person to find the just balance between the two moral duties to protect the rights of proper citizens and to guarantee assistance and welcome to migrants.

11. The Joy of the Gospel

But the work of evangelization is not exhausted here. The gospel is that secret that on one hand nurtures military charity more than life, above all in those who are involved in difficult operations or forced to endure events that can transform human life, for example, recovery of bodies. The gospel teaches us the meaning of life and death, of an interior life capable of increasing and testifying to hope in the transcendent and eternal.

The gospel is also the way our military can combat the roots of war: tracking down the remote causes and battling against injustice, violence, poverty, ignorance, discrimination; pulling together the anthropological roots, constructing models of living together, dialogue, peace pardon, models that demonstrate respect and reconciliation that are not lost pathways, not even in a socio-political sense. Is this not the perspective of the encyclical *Laudato Si* and the opening to the Year of Mercy?

12. The Holy Door and the Vision/outlook of Christ

Thus the mission assigned today to Christian military and to all military throughout the world is to transform, within limits, those whom others want to block, into welcome in our “common home” particularly through the “holy door” through which refugees can carry their experience of Divine Mercy and the grace to those who are helping them.¹⁵ Relive thereby the gospel of the Good Samaritan (LK 10:25-37 chosen by Pope Francis as the icon of the Year of Mercy, an icon that seems to be pictured in the words of vision of the group from the sea of more than 70 migrants arriving in the Straits of Sicily in August 2009: “We saw you in the ships but you passed by and did not stop on your route. We were desperate, but one fisherman, five days ago, gave us a little water and bread.”¹⁶ Those in the ships passed by and did not stop.... The levite and the priest saw and passed by and did not stop.... Only one fisherman, one Samaritan...perhaps one military will not pass because, as you see, in you is the vision of Jesus toward your world, your brothers, your refugees: that outlook of grace toward those—as we read about in *Laudato Si*—“creatures of this world who are presented not merely as a natural phenomenon, because their resurrection develops mysteriously and orients them toward a destiny of fullness.”¹⁷

1 Francesco, Lettera Enciclica *Laudato sì*, nn. 3- 6

2 Francesco, Lettera Enciclica *Laudato sì*, nn. 1; 3

3 Giovanni Paolo II, Discorso ai vescovi e ai laici dell’Apostolato Militare Internazionale, 21 giugno 1986

4 Fonte: Comunicato Fondazione Migrantes, ANSA 9 dicembre 2015

5 Fonte: Ministero dell’Interno, Rapporto sull’accoglienza di migranti e rifugiati in Italia, Roma 2015, Appendice; Comando Generale delle Capitanerie di Porto, Roma 2015

6 Francesco, Lettera Enciclica *Laudato sì*, n. 22

7 Francesco, Lettera Enciclica *Laudato sì*, n. 25

8 Fonte: Ministero dell’Interno, Rapporto sull’accoglienza di migranti e rifugiati in Italia, Roma 2015. Appendice

9 Sergio Mattarella, Discorso al Meeting di Comunione e Liberazione, Rimini, 19 agosto 2016

10 Francesco, Lettera Enciclica *Laudato sì*, n. 52

11 Francesco, Discorso per il conferimento del premio Carlo Magno, 6 maggio 2016

12 Francesco, Lettera Enciclica *Laudato sì*, n. 53

13 Francesco, Discorso per il conferimento del Premio Carlo Magno, 6 maggio 2016

14 Francesco, Discorso al Corpo Diplomatico accreditato presso la Santa Sede, 11 gennaio 2016

15 Francesco, *Angelus*, 17 gennaio 2016

16 G. Ruotolo, *Dalla Libia alla morte: “Nessuno ci aiutava”*, in *La Stampa*, 21 agosto 2009, p. 1 (tratto da L. Manicardi, *La fatica della carità*. Qiqajion 2010, p. 7)

17 Francesco, Lettera Enciclica *Laudato sì*, n. 100